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The Smugglers of New York Bay. By Old Sleuth.

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By OLD SLEUTH.

"How about this Government officer who has been prowling around here?" was the question which fell from Garcia's lips.

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By OLD SLEUTH.

CHAPTER I.

"Hold, stranger!"

The words fell from beautiful lips under the most exciting circumstances.

A boat rocked upon the calm water that murmured along the shore, when a young man came down from the upper bank of white drift sand, and seized the tiller rope. He had the rope in his hand, his arm was upraised to draw the boat to his feet, when he was startled by hearing the words with which we open our narrative.

The young man turned toward the speaker, and encountered a sight that caused his handsome eyes to bulge with amazement.

It was a clear, cloudless night, and a half moon shed its diminished radiance on surrounding objects, and revealed to the astonished gaze of the young man the weird-appearing figure of a young girl.

One glance was sufficient to announce the fact that the girl was beautiful, but alas! in what questionable shape did she appear? She was attired in a loose gown tightened about the waist with a leathern belt, her feet were bare, and her long hair hung unkempt upon her shoulders.

As our old-time readers know, we are not heavy on the beauty-describing business, and we will merely declare that the girl was indeed a lovely creature, clad in rags; but she was beautiful, and Spencer Vanee, the young man, discerned the fact at a glance, and his amazement was the greater because of the thrilling conditions under which he beheld so great loveliness.

The young man made no immediate answer to the girl's abrupt salutation, but merely stood and gazed at her without any attempt to conceal his utter astonishment.

"You must not go off in the yacht to-night!" said the girl.

"Why must I stay ashore to-night?"

"Danger is ahead of you!"

"But I am an old sailor, miss; I can take care of myself, I reckon."

The girl drew close to the young man, laid her hand upon his arm, and in a husky voice, whispered:

"The danger comes not from the sea! *You will be a victim!*"

The young man let the boat line fall from his grasp, a fierce light shone in his eyes, and there was a tremulousness, but not of fear, in his voice as he demanded:

"Who sent you to tell me this?"

"It matters not, you are doomed if you go on the yacht to-night! never again will your feet press the hard shore, but the waves will cast you up!"

"Who are you, miss, and why have you come to warn me?"

A moment the girl was silent. She hung her head and appeared lost in thought, but at length, looking up and fixing her magnificent blue eyes upon the young man, she said:

"I do not know who I am, but I do know that if you go out on the yacht to-night, you will never return till the waves wash your dead form to the beach!"

"You must have some reason for coming to warn me?"

"Yes; I would save your life!"

"Why are you so deeply interested in saving my life?"

"I would warn any one whom I knew was in peril! and you must heed my words!"

"I can not!"

"Are you seeking death?"

"No."

"I do not understand."

"And I can not explain, but I must go out though death meet me upon the crest of every wave."

The girl again remained silent for a moment, but at length in a still lower whisper, she said:

"You have been betrayed!"

The young man started, and a slight pallor overspread his handsome face as he caught the girl's delicate arm in his firm grasp, and demanded:

"Who am I?"

"You are Spencer Vance."

The young man could not conceal an expression of extreme astonishment.

"Who told you my name was Spencer Vance?"

"It matters not, but take heed; go not out on the sea to-night."

"I tell you I must! I will go, but you must tell me what you know of Spencer Vance."

"You are a revenue detective; you are in the employ of the Government; you have been betrayed, and to-night you are to be silenced if you go out on the yacht!"

"Do the men on the yacht know who I am?"

"They do not know your name, but they suspect you are a Government detective, and they have determined to put you out of the way; to-night they will do the deed if you go."

"Some one must have told them I was a Government officer."

"Yes; some one told them."

"Do you know who gave the information?"

"I do."

"Will you tell me?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I have warned you, now go your way, and save your life! they are desperate men; the waves have already received three of their victims within a year; go, and your doom is sealed! Nothing can save you!"

"I shall go!"

"You do not believe my words?"

"I will believe you if you will tell me who betrayed me to the smugglers."

"*I* did!" came the startling response.

The detective stood the girl off from him at arm's-length, and studied her from feet to head.

The girl stood and calmly submitted to the inspection.

"So you are the traitor?"

"No."

"You admit you betrayed me?"

"I am no traitor! I owe nothing to you! I had a right to inform the boys if I saw fit, and I did so."

"And now you come and warn me?"

"Yes."

"Why do you warn me, if you are the one who set them on to murder me?"

"I did not think they would murder you, and now I have come to warn you."

"Are you engaged in the business?"

"No."

The girl spoke in a scornful tone, and her eyes flashed with indignation.

"Who are you?"

"I do not know who I am."

A strange look came into the detective's eyes as an idea flashed through his mind.

"Are you the child of a wreck?"

"I do not know. I know nothing about myself."

"Whom do you live with?"

"The man who calls himself my father."

"Is he not your father?"

"No."

"Has he confessed to you that he is not your father?"

"No."

"Then how do you know he is not your father?"

"I know he is not."

"Why do you live with him?"

"Where should I go? I have no other home, and he is kind to me."

"Is he a smuggler?"

"It is not fair to ask me that question."

"Why not?"

"I have told you all that was needful to warn you of your own peril; you should not take advantage of my frankness."

The detective looked upon the lovely girl with a deep sense of pity in his heart. Her appearance seemed to tell her tale, and it was sad to think that such wondrous beauty was but the plaything of a gang of rough sailors.

"Are you married?" asked the detective, abruptly.

"No," came the answer, in a quick, decisive tone.

"Will you tell me your name?"

"They call me Renie."

"And your father's name?"

"Tom Pearce."

"The boat-keeper?"

"Yes."

"And you informed the men who I was?" repeated the detective.

"Yes."

"How did you find out that I was a Government officer?"

"I will not tell you."

"How did you find out that the men intended to go for me to-night?"

"I overheard them arranging their plans."

"Do they know that you overheard them?"

"No."

"Then when they discover that I am up to their plans, will they not accuse you of having betrayed them?"

"That is a question I can not answer."

"I am astonished that you should put me in this peril, and then come and warn me!"

"I tell you I did not think my information would be followed by anything serious."

"But you tell me that three other officers have suffered by them."

"I did not know that until after I had told them who you were."

"Did you tell them directly?"

"No."

"Well, Renie, I am much obliged to you."

"And you will not go off in the yacht to-night?"

"I will think the matter over."

"Promise me that you will not go!" pleaded the girl, in an earnest tone.

"I will not promise; but if I do go, you need have no fear. I can take care of myself, forewarned, you know, is forearmed. Good-night, Renie."

"I shall never forgive myself if you are injured!"

"Thank you for your interest; but you need have no fear. I can take care of myself; the crew of the yacht 'Nancy' will not toss me to the fishes to-night."

The girl turned and walked away under the moonlight, and a strange impulse caused the detective to follow her.

The girl moved along like an uncouth apparition over the yielding sand, and had traversed fully a quarter of a mile along the shore, when suddenly a man leaped down from the bank and confronted her.

The detective, in shadowing the strange girl, had kept well in under the shadow of the bluff, and could not have been seen; and when he saw the man confront the girl, he moved rapidly forward, and gained a point near enough to overhear the talk that passed between them.

The man was a rough, villainous-looking fellow, and his voice was coarse and his manners vulgar. It was evident that the girl was annoyed at meeting him, as was immediately betrayed by her manner.

"Hello, Renie, I've been waiting a long time for a chance to have a talk with you."

"I do not wish to have a talk with you, though, Sol Burton; so good-night!"

"Not so fast, my pretty bird; I've something to tell you."

"And I don't wish to stop and listen to you."

"You would if you knew all I had to tell."

"Well, as I don't know all you've got to tell, and as I don't desire to listen to you, I'll bid you good-night."

"You always were down on me, Renie, but I'm a friend of your'n arter all, and I've collared the secret of your life, and I'd tell it to you, only you're so darn uppish when I go to speak to you."

The detective saw the girl advance toward the rough-looking man, and overheard her say:

"You know the secret of my life?"

"Yes."

"What secret is there of my life?"

"Tom Pearce is not your daddy, but I know how you came to be his adopted child."

The girl trembled from head to foot.

"Sol Burton, tell me all you know."

"Ah! you will listen to me, my pretty bird?"

"Yes, I will."

CHAPTER II.

THE man chuckled as he said:

"I thought you would listen to me when I let on what I know'd."

"Tell me the secret!" commanded the girl.

"Oh, yes, Renie! but I've a condition."

"A condition? What condition would you exact?"

"You must become my wife. There, the thing's out; so now, what have you got to say?"

"I say, no!"

"That's your decision?"

"That's my decision."

"Be careful, gal. I only asked you to marry me to give you a chance; remember you're nobody's child, and I've hooked on to the secret."

"You're a mean man, Sol Burton, to threaten me!"

"Well, the fact is, Renie, I like you! I'm dead in love with you, and I'm willing to marry yer, and that's more than most of the fellows round here would do, knowing all I know."

"Good-night, Sol Burton, I'll not stop to talk with you, nor will I tell my father that you said insulting words to me."

"What do you suppose I care about Tom Pearce? I can whisper a few words in his ear that will take some of the starch out of him! He's been mighty uppish about you, although he's let you run round the beach barefoot these sixteen years."

"Go talk to Tom Pearce, and do not be the coward to repeat your threats to me!"

The girl started to move away, when the man suddenly leaped forward and grasped her in his arms, but the same instant he received a blow which sent him reeling, as the girl was snatched from his rude grasp.

A curse fell from the man's lips, and he arose to his feet and advanced toward the man who had struck him.

"Run home, little girl!" whispered the detective; "I will take care of this brute!"

"Thank you!" said the girl, and she glided away along the beach.

"See here, you're the man who struck me?"

"Yes, I'm the man."

"I think I've seen you before."

"I think we've met before."

"What did you hit me for?"

"I struck you because you put your hands rudely upon the girl."

"Yer did, eh?"

"Yes."

The man leaped toward the detective with the remark:

"Well, it's my turn now!"

And his turn it proved to be, as he received a rap which caused him to turn clean over.

Sol Burton was raving mad when he once more regained his feet; the fellow was an ugly chap, a great bully ashore, and a cruel heartless man afloat. As he arose he exclaimed:

"All right, you're fixed for me to-night; but my time will come! I'll get square with you before you're much older!"

Sol Burton turned and walked away a baffled man.

Spencer Vance walked to the point on the beach where he had stood when the girl had come to him with the strange warning.

The young man was a Government officer, a special detective, and had been assigned to the collector at the port of New York to run down an organized gang of smugglers who were known to be doing a large business off the Long Island coast.

Several detectives had been detailed to work up the matter, and one after another they had mysteriously disappeared, and the Government had never succeeded in solving the mystery of their taking off; and further, none of the officers had ever been able to locate the head-quarters of the gang.

One fact had been established: large quantities of smuggled goods had been carried into New York, and each week the Government was swindled out of thousands of dollars of revenue; and the illicit traffic had grown to such an extent that a number of honest merchants had subscribed a large sum of money which had been placed at the disposal of the collector to be used as a fund for the breaking up of the gang, who were ruining regular importers in certain branches of trade and commerce.

Spencer Vance, although but a young man, had quite a reputation as a detective. He had done some daring work in running down a gang of forgers, and in the employ of a State Government, he had been very successful in breaking up several gangs of illicit whisky distillers. He was a resolute, cool, experienced man, an officer who had faced death a hundred times under the most perilous circumstances, and when summoned upon the new duty he accepted the position readily.

By methods of his own he got upon the track of the workers: the men who did the actual work of landing the contraband goods.

The latter were not the really guilty men. They were not the principals, the capitalists; but they were the employees who for large pay ran off the coast, intercepted the steamers carrying the contraband goods, and landed them within certain assigned limits.

The men ostensibly were fishermen, and honest people among whom they associated never "tumbled" to their real calling.

CHAPTER III.

THE necessities of our narrative do not demand that we should locate the exact quarter where the smugglers operated; and, besides, as there were numerous gangs covering a space of fifty miles along the coast, it would be almost impossible to indicate intelligibly the field of their operations, were we so inclined.

Spencer Vance, as stated, had adopted his own measures for locating the men; in his earlier life he had been a sailor, and had worked his way up until at the age of nineteen he held the position of second mate on a large schooner; and when he was assigned to the special duty of "piping" the smugglers, his sea experience came in good play, and was of great aid to him in his perilous duty.

The officer started out on his work by taking passage to the Island of Cuba, and one day in the port of Havana a ragged sailor dropped into a groggery kept by a Frenchman and made himself acquainted with a number of sailors, who were having a good time ashore.

The ragged Jack told his own tale, won upon the good-will of the jolly fellows who were in for a good time, and in the end was shipped for New York on a fast-sailing schooner.

The detective had had an eye on the schooner, and well knew, when as a sea-tramp he shipped on the vessel, he had struck a smuggler.

It was a clear starry night when the vessel sighted the Long Island shore after having slipped inward past Fire Island.

The detective lay low and watched for some hours. He had known that something unusual was in progress on board the schooner. The captain was below, and one of the mates had charge of the deck; a light shone in the distance, like a red star dancing over the waves, and the men on the schooner moved about in a stealthy manner to and fro across the deck.

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It was a strange thing to do; why should they tread thus lightly the deck of a ship ten miles off shore, as though their footsteps might be heard? Alas! it was a case of involuntary stealth, a sign of the nervous trepidation which attends conscious guilt.

It did not seem that there could be any danger near; the heavens were clear, the bosom of the deep unruffled even by an evening breeze. Nature called not for the coward tread, and the gleaming eye, the pale face, and the anxious glance hither and thither. No, no; but the smugglers feared another peril. Revenue cutters were known to be cruising along the coast; more than ordinary vigilance was being exercised by a robbed Government.

The men upon the schooner knew that the revenue officers were up to many of their tricks and were posted as to many of their signals; false lights might gleam across the waters like an *ignis fatuus* luring on a famished traveler in the desert, and within the hour after their calling had been betrayed, every man might be in irons, and the cargo and the vessel would be confiscated.

A fortune was at stake, and the shadow of a prison loomed out over across the waters and threatened to close in behind them.

Spencer Vance, the disguised detective, the supposed sea-tramp, moved about with the smugglers, acting as they acted, stepping on tiptoe, and looking pale and anxious, and it did not require that he should assume the pale excited look, for it was a momentous crisis. He had hit the vessel the first clip, and he had struck the trail which had baffled men who claimed a larger experience in that particular branch of the detective service. He had "piped" down to a critical moment, but he carried his life in his hands. He was not watched, but one false move might draw attention toward him, and but a mere suspicion at that particular moment would cost him his life; these men would not have stopped to bandy words or make inquiries.

As stated, there came the gleam of a light flashing across the calm waters, and the men who were not on ship duty strained their eyes. Soon there followed a succession of lights, signal lights telling their story, and then the schooner men let out answering lights, and the sails were lowered and the schooner merely drifted upon the bosom of the deep.

Spencer Vance was speechless with excitement as the little game proceeded.

At this perid in our story we will not describe the *modus operandi*, as later on we propose to fully depict the smugglers' methods under more exciting circumstances, when Spencer Vance was better prepared to checkmate the game. We have here only indicated in an introductory form the detective's keen plan for running down and locating the haunts of the pirates.

Three days following the maneuvers of the schooner off the coast, the detective appeared at a fishing village, and at once he set to locating his shore men.

It was not the poor sailors, who were mere instruments in the robbery scheme, whom the detective was seeking to "pipe" down. His game was to follow certain clews until he trailed up to the capitalists, the really guilty parties, the rich men who flaunted in New York in elegance and luxury on their ill-gotten gains.

The detective had got on good terms with one of the gangs. He had been off several times with them on a cruise, and considered that he was fast working down to a dead open-and-shut, and the really guilty parties, when he received the strange warning at the hands of the weird, but beautiful girl, who called herself Renie Pearce.

That same night the detective had engaged to go off in the yacht; it was understood that a smuggler was expected off the coast that night, and he was looking to strike on a big "lay."

We must explain to our readers that the arrival of expected vessels is an uncertain event, and the shore watchers were sometimes compelled to go off night after night, even for weeks, before the vessel, sending out the long-looked-for signals, hove in sight off the horizon; and it was on these vigil nights the detective had sailed out with the men. He had thought his game well played, his disguise perfect, his victory sure, when, as stated, at the last moment, a strange, beautiful girl came along and whispered in his ear the terrible warning that danger awaited him if he went off in the boat that night.

Spencer Vance, however, was undaunted; the warning was not sufficient to deter him going off and braving death in the way of duty, and he would have gone had not an incident occurred that caused him to await another opportunity.

As recorded, after his encounter with Sol Burton, he returned to where his boat lay, determined to go off to the yacht, when a second time an apparition glided to his side and whispered a few startling words in his ear.

CHAPTER IV.

THE detective stood by his boat thinking over the thrilling position of affairs, when Renie Pearce once more appeared before him.

"Hello! you've come back, eh?" called the detective.

"Yes."

"Well, what now?"

"You are determined to go off to-night."

"Well?"

"You must not go, *there's better game for you ashore!*"

The detective was thrown off; he could not understand the girl. Renie had confessed that she had originally betrayed him to the smugglers, and then, when danger threatened, she came and warned him, and her warning failing, she came tripping to him once more, barefooted, ragged, and beautiful, and held out to him an alluring bait.

There was no misunderstanding the purport of her words. She betrayed the fact that she knew his full purpose, and her words implied that she was ready to throw him a larger and more certain game. Her words were, "There's better game for you ashore!"

"Are you my friend, Renie?"

"Yes; I am your friend."

"If you are my friend, why did you betray me to the smugglers?"

"I was not your friend then, I am your friend now. I can serve you and *you can serve me!* Your life is in danger. You will never return if you go off in the yacht to-night. I had prepared you for your doom, but now I will save you, and again I tell you that there's better game ashore."

"Why should I trust you? do you not confess to having betrayed me?"

"I only knew you then as a Government detective; now I know you are a man."

"You must have made the latter discovery very suddenly."

"I did."

"When?"

"When you knocked Sol Burton down; that man meant me harm. I could have defended myself against him, but a greater peril menaces me to-night."

"What peril menaces you?"

"I have no confidant in the world; shall I make one of you?"

"Yes."

"My confidence may get you into trouble."

"How so?"

"You are a brave, noble man; you will desire to act as my champion."

"You are a strange girl."

"Yes; mine is a hard lot; I am a waif; I am nothing; I am an outcast; a thing, and yet—"

The girl ceased. She had spoken with a wild energy, and she had looked ravishingly beautiful while talking.

"And yet, what?" said the detective interrogatively.

"My heart is full of all the ambitions that might fill the heart of a girl born in the midst of splendor and luxury; and although the companion of smugglers, I love only what is pure and beautiful; I cherish the fondest dreams, and yet—"

Again the detective supplemented:

"Well, go on."

"I am a poor, ragged, barefooted girl, the daughter of a boat-keeper, and that is not all!"

"Tell me all."

"Shall I?"

"Yes."

"I had reason to suppose that my pretended father was my friend; one thing is certain no millionaire ever guarded a fair daughter with more tenderness than he has guarded me. He has sent me to school, and has permitted me to become educated far above my station. You know in this land that is an easy thing for a poor man to do, but within a few days strange suspicions have crossed my mind; no man even among the roughest of them ever dared *insult me.* Tom Pearce would have killed the man who dared bring one faint flush to my cheek with his vile tongue! but alas! I fear—fear."

"What do you fear?"

"Shall I say it?"

"Certainly."

"I fear his tender care of me *has been a speculation.*"

"You do not believe he is your friend?"

"I fear he is not."

"Some enemy may have traduced Tom Pearce."

"No; the words that aroused my suspicions *fell from his own lips.*"

"And what do you fear?"

"You must learn from other lips."

"Who will tell me?"

"If you are to know at all, you must learn my fears from the lips of my enemies."

"How shall I do that?"

"Are you willing to serve me?"

The detective was silent. He was certainly charmed and lured by this beautiful child of the shore, but could he afford to undertake to be the champion of a barefooted girl, though she did own a strangely beautiful face?

"If you serve me I will serve you."

"What can you do for me?"

The girl's eyes gleamed as she answered:

"Let me but know that these men are my foes, that I owe them no gratitude, and I can give you information for which the government would pay thousands! and even to-night in serving me you would also serve yourself."

"Will you tell me how?"

"One of the bosses is to visit the shore to-night."

"Aha! there is where the whale blows."

"Yes."

"Who does he visit?"

"Tom Pearce."

"What is his purpose?"

"I only guess."

"What do you guess?"

"Am I to speak more plainly to you, or can you not discern?"

"Have you ever met the man?"

"Yes."

"You fear him?"

"I do not know yet; you may find out."

"What do you suspect?"

A moment the girl was silent, but at length she said:

"I suspect I am to be sent away!"

"You mistrust your reputed father?"

"I do."

"And this man comes to-night?"

"Yes."

"You would offer a suggestion?"

"Are you prepared to take advantage of my information?"

"I am."

"Watch them: learn their purpose!"

"Where do they meet?"

"In my father's cabin."

"Lead me there."

"I will;"

The detective decided not to go off in the yacht that night. He preferred to be "taken in tow" by beautiful little barefoot, and strange adventures were the outcome of his change of plans.

The detective and the girl traversed a mile and a half of the beach and then struck inland, and soon came in sight of the glimmer of lights gleaming forth from a fisherman's shanty.

"They meet there. You know how to act, and I can give you no 'points' when it comes to 'piping.' Good-bye for the present."

The girl glided away and the detective proceeded toward the cabin only to encounter a series of thrilling, extraordinary, and startling adventures.

CHAPTER V.

SPENCER VANCE had become greatly interested in the beautiful Renie during the walk along the beach. He had become deeply impressed with the purity, yet weirdness of her character. He had pressed the girl for some reminiscence of her early childhood, but she had no recollections beyond the sea and the fisherman's cabin where she had lived with old Tom Pearce and his wife.

Her supposed father had for years rowed her every morning across the bay to the mainland, where she had attended the village school, from whence she had passed to the high school, at

which her reputed father had supported her for a couple of years.

Mrs. Pearce died suddenly one day after a few hours' illness. Just before her death Renie was alone with her in the room. The woman had been unconscious, but she momentarily recovered consciousness and summoned the girl to her bedside and attempted to communicate some parting intelligence, but alas! she only succeeded in uttering a few disjointed exclamations, suggestive, but not directly and fully intelligible. The half-uttered exclamations only served to confirm certain suspicions that had long floated unsuggested through the girl's mind, and her disappointment was bitter when the icy hand of death strangled the communications which the dying woman was seeking to make.

The girl had formed a sort of attachment for Tom Pearce. The man was a good-natured, jolly sailor sort of a fellow, and, as intimated, had always treated the girl with the utmost kindness and consideration.

It was thus matters stood up to the time of the detective's strange meeting with the girl upon the beach.

As the girl pointed to the house and concluded the words which close our preceding chapter, she glided away, and left the detective to "work his own passage."

During the walk along the beach Renie had been a little more explicit in explaining her immediate peril, and our hero was prepared to more intelligently enact the rôle of the eavesdropper.

The cabin of Tom Pearce, the boatman, was an ordinary fisherman's hut, built in the midst of white sand-hills, with a few willows planted on a little patch of made earth, and serving as protectors against the fierce summer blaze of the sun.

The detective crept up to the cabin, and climbing upon a rear shed which served as a cover to several boats and a large quantity of nets, he covered himself with a fragment of old sailcloth, and secured a position from where, through a little opening which in the summer was left unclosed, he could see into the main room of the cottage. He could not only see, but could as readily overhear any conversation that might occur.

Glancing into the room, he saw Tom Pearce, whom he had seen many times before on board several of the boats that sail over the bay. The fisherman, or rather smuggler, was seated before a table on which stood a ship's lamp, reading what appeared to be an old time-stained letter, and after an interval he muttered aloud:

"Well, well, I don't know what to do! That girl is dear to my old heart, and I'd rather die than any harm should come to her; and again I don't like to stand in her way; while according to this letter from the old woman, written nigh on to thirteen years ago, I've no right to let her pass from my possession."

The mutterings of the old man were interrupted by a loud rap at his rickety door.

"Come in!" called the old smuggler.

The door opened, and a roughly dressed man strode into the cabin.

"Hello, Pearce! I see you are here to meet me."

"Yes, Mr. Garcia, I'm waiting for you."

Mr. Garcia took a seat by the table opposite the old smuggler, and saw the latter crumple the letter and put it in his pocket.

"Eh, old man, what's that your hiding?"

"Nothing that will interest you, sir; it's only an old letter from my dead wife, sent to me many years ago when she was visiting some of her friends over in Connecticut."

"How about this Government officer who has been prowling around here?" was the next question which fell from Garcia's lips.

"Well, that's more than I can tell you, but he'll be fixed to-night, whoever he is! Yes, sir, he'll not cause the lads any trouble, they've 'tumbled' to him too soon."

"They've tumbled, eh?"

"Yes: and they got up a false cruise to-night on purpose to carry him out to sea."

"How was it the boys chanced to 'drop' to him?"

"Renie did the business.'

"Renie did the business?" ejaculated the man.

"Yes, sir; she went through him. She is a wonderful girl, she is, but I don't think she really meant to give the fellow away, but we caught her in a trap."

"You caught her in a trap?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"Well, she was sending a message to warn the detective of his danger, and the letter was intercepted, and so we got into the whole business. I tell you the fellows were mad, and had it been anybody but Renie, they'd never have sent another message."

"Does Renie know her letter was intercepted?"

"I don't think she does."

"Why would she want to give the Government officer the 'tip?'"

"No telling about these women, sir, no telling about them; you see this man is a good-looking chap, a very handsome fellow, and he's a daring man, too, and a splendid sailor! It's a pity he wasn't one of the crew. I tell you he saved the lives of all the lads one night off the coast; but he's doomed! He'll never save nobody again!

"Has he been making love to the girl?"

"No; I reckon he's never seen her, but she's seen him; you see Renie goes under cover sometimes, and she wanders along the shore for hours, and one night she came upon the detective when he was holding a parley with a pal from the city; the gal 'laid low' and overheard all that was said, and at the same time she 'nipped' a letter which the man dropped from his jacket, and thus got down on the whole business; but somehow her heart went ag'in giving the man away, and she writes a letter ready to deliver to him; and by ginger, she mislaid her letter, and my nephew, a rattling little chap, 'nipped' it and gave it to the Cap, and the whole business was out!"

"You are sure there has been no acquaintance between the detective and your daughter?"

"Yes; I am sure of that."

"Why are you sure?"

"Well, I've Renie's word, and that gal would die before she would tell a lie; no, sir, she's never spoke to him, and as she never has, she never will, for his accounts will all be cleared to-night! the lads will have a dead open and shut on him."

"I reckon you've been deceived," said Garcia.

"How so?"

"That gal has known more of this man than you think. She would not warn *a stranger* that his life was in peril, especially when that stranger was her father's foe."

"Well, it don't make any difference. She will never see him again!"

"We can't tell about that."

"What do you mean?"

"I'll bet a thousand dollars the man didn't go off on the cruise to-night!"

"Yes, he did."

"Did you see him aboard?"

"No; but I know he went."

"That girl would know that the letter was lost."

"Yes, very likely."

"Well, she'd take some other measures to warn the man; you've been deceived, old man!"

"I hope you're mistaken, or it will be bad for Renie. I tell you the men will be raging mad if the detective slips through their nets to-night."

"They will be, and now you recognize the necessity of *turning the girl over to me.*"

"I've been thinking over that matter."

"You remember what I promised you?"

"Yes, yes; but suppose *he should come?*"

"Who should come?"

The old smuggler had spoken the words in a thoughtful manner, and the question was really addressed to himself. The old smuggler recognized that he had made a startling admission and remained silent.

Garcia said:

"I suppose you mean the day might come when some one will appear to claim the girl, and you will lose a large sum of money?"

"No, no; you do not know what I mean, you have never heard the girl's strange history."

"I know she is not your child."

"Yes; you forced that confession from me a long time ago."

"Tell me the girl's history."

"I dare not."

"Does she know the tale?"

"No."

"She believes herself your child?"

"I think she has a suspicion that she is not my child, but she loves me."

"Has she ever asked you whether or not she is your child?"

"Never!"

"Nor hinted?"

"Never!"

"Then why do you say she suspects that she is not your child?"

"Well, from many little things I have been led to suspect that. She herself has a suspicion of the real truth."

"You must then tell me her history."

"I dare not."

"Listen old man, I am her friend and your friend; this is no place for Renie; when she was a mere child it was all right, but now it is not safe. You must give her to me! and listen: Should any one ever come to claim her, she shall be surrendered, and you shall receive any reward that may be paid!"

"I do not think any one will ever come for her, but could I solve one mystey I know where to look."

"For what?"

"Her friends."

CHAPTER VI.

Garcia was evidently, as the listening detective discerned, a very shrewd, quick-witted man.

He fixed his keen dark eyes on the old smuggler, and said:

"There is something you are keeping back from me; come now, I will pay you one hundred dollars to tell me Renie's history."

"You will give a hundred dollars?" Pearce exclaimed, in an eager tone.

"Yes, I will."

"You will pay the money right down?"

"Yes."

"I will show the letter."

The old man went down in his pocket, and drew forth the time-stained letter he had been reading when the detective first looked in upon him, and drawing closer to the light, said:

"I won't show you the whole letter, but I will read just one portion to you," and he read as follows:

"Dear Tom,—There has been one thing on my mind for a long time. I am getting old, and at any time might die, and I have a secret which I feel I should share with you in order to guard against accidents. Upon that terrible night when Renie was placed in my care, there was also consigned to my keeping a box—a sealed box—which I was never to open until Renie should reach the age of twenty-one, or be called for by parties claiming her as their child. I was given to understand that the box contained proofs of the dear child's birth and parentage, and it was hinted that some day she would inherit an immense fortune. I never told you about the box, but when I return I will confide to you the place where it is concealed, so that you will be prepared to carry out the trust in case anything should happen to me before Renie becomes of age, or is claimed by those who placed her in my charge."

The remainder of the letter had no bearing upon the case of Renie, but was devoted to general matters.

After Tom Pearce had concluded the reading there followed a momentary silence. The man Garcia appeared to be lost in deep thought. The old smuggler also appeared to be lost in deep meditation.

After an interval Garcia said:

"From that letter it would appear that the proofs of the girl's identity were in your wife's possession?"

"Yes."

"Did she keep her promise to you?"

"You mean did she inform me where the box was hidden?"

"Yes."

"She did not."

"And she died without making the revelation?"

"Yes, she died very suddenly."

"Did you ever search over her papers?"

"I did."

"And never came across the slightest clew?'

"Never!"

"Why was it she did not make a confidant of you?"

"Well, I was a pretty wild sort of man in those days, and it's my idea that many precious jewels are hidden in that box."

The eyes of the man Garcia glistened as he asked.

"What makes you think so?"

"Well, my old woman let fall many strange hints now and then, and always said that Renie would be rich some day—immensely rich."

"She meant when claimed by her friends?"

"Yes; but she once said that Renie would be rich whether her friends claimed her or not; and what is more, money was always ready when anything was needed for the girl."

"But the girl has been allowed to run loose."

"Not altogether; no, sir, not altogether; Renie has received an expensive education, and my wife always found the money to pay the bills; the girl thinks she was educated out of my hard earnings, but never a dollar of my money went for her support until after the old woman died!"

"Have you ever searched for the box?"

"I have."

"Do you suppose your wife ever opened it?"

"That I can not tell, but once when she and I were in the City of New York, we read about a great singer who had some magnificent jewels, and my wife said to me: 'I'll wager I could show jewels handsomer and richer than that critter's got, and they claim hers are valued at a hundred thousand dollars.'"

The detective heard all these strange revelations, and he made up his mind that there was a big job falling into his hands.

"You say you have searched for the box?"

"Yes."

"And never found it or gained any clew as to its whereabouts?"

"Never."

"Has Renie any knowledge of the box?"

"I don't know whether my wife ever made a confidant of the child."

"Has the girl ever spoken of it?"

"Never."

"And you have never mentioned it to her?"

"Never."

"Who was with your wife when she died?"

"Renie."

"She may have made a final revelation to the girl?"

"I think not."

"How long has your wife been dead?"

"Three years."

"Tom Pearce, all you tell me makes me more anxious to take charge of the girl: but tell me all the circumstances under which she came to be placed in your charge."

After a moment's thought the old man said:

"*I will.*"

"One calm winter's day, the boating men hereabouts were surprised to see a handsome and trim-built yacht come sailing through the channel; and running up the bay to a good anchorage, she let go her iron and lay like a great swan on the water.

"A short time afterward, a foreign-looking man was landed on the beach, and he strolled around among the fishermen's huts and only spoke when addressed by some of the fishermen: but I tell you his great black eyes were busy glancing around. No one knew at the time what he was looking for, but it was evident he was searching for something, and my wife and I later on were the only ones who fell into the mystery."

"The man was studying the faces of the people hereabouts?" suggested Garcia.

"That was just what he was doing, and later on he made inquiries here and there, and as events proved, my wife was the woman who struck his fancy."

"And did he bring her the child?"

"Hold on! let me tell the story just as the events happened. I told you it was in the winter when the yacht hove to in the bay; well, one bitter and blustering night about three days after the arrival of the yacht, I was over on the mainland having a carouse, and toward morning took the chances of crossing the bay in a catboat to my home. How I ever reached here in safety I'll never tell, but I ran on to the beach all right, and footed to my shanty! Well, sir, as I neared the house pretty well sobered, the first thing I heard was the wail of an infant; and I tell you I was surprised, and entering the house I saw my wife with a lovely child in her arms, which she was feeding with a spoon.

"'Hello, Betsy,' I yelled, 'where did you get that little squealer from?'

"Well, sir, my wife raised her finger to her lips, and warned me to be silent, and in a low tone told me that on the following day she would tell me all about it. Well, you see I was pretty well fagged out, and I always had an idea that what my wife said and done was right. So I tumbled into bed without making any further inquiries.

"Well, the next morning my good wife told me as how amidst the storm when it was at its greatest fury, the strange man who had come ashore from the yacht, entered our cabin having a bundle wrapped in his arms, and she told me how surprised she was when he opened his bundle and discovered a beautiful little child about a year old."

"Renie was only a year old when placed in your charge?"

"That's all, sir."

"Well, proceed."

"There ain't much more to tell; my wife told me that the man had left the child in her charge, and that we were to be well paid for its keep; and as long as Betsy thought it was all right, I made no objection."

"Did the man ever come again?"

"No, sir; the day following the bringing of the child ashore the yacht sailed away and never since has her prow plowed the waters of the bay. Nor has any one belonging to her ever been seen in these parts."

"And how long ago did this occur?"

"Nigh onto seventeen years ago, sir."

"And Renie is about eighteen years old?"

"Thereabouts, sir."

"It is not likely that she will ever be claimed."

"Hardly, sir."

"It is not likely that the box will ever be found."

"Hardly, sir."

There was one man, however, who dissented from the latter opinion; the detective in his own mind resolved that he would find that box, if it took him years to trace it; meantime the man Garcia opened his scheme.

"Tom, you must let me have the girl."

"I am willing; but the girl herself objects."

"She does?"

"Yes."

"You have spoken to her?"

"Yes; I told her a rich gentleman in New York wished to adopt her, a man who would bring her up as his own child; but she answered that she did not wish to go to New York; did not desire to be adopted, and would not leave me."

"She must be compelled to go with me!"

"I wouldn't like to do that."

"Listen, Tom, let me have the girl, and I will pay you two thousand dollars down in gold!"

"But she will not go with you."

"We can manage that."

"How do you mean to manage it?"

"We'll play a trick on her, and I tell you when once I get her in my house, she will find things so pleasant and delightful she will never wish to return to this place again!"

"I can't play no tricks on the gal! no, no, she's got perfect confidence in me, and I would not betray her confidence, not even for two thousand dollars in gold! And I'm a poor man, sir, very poor, and I'm old and getting feeble!"

"I'll tell you what we can do, Tom; you can bring her to New York to visit me."

"Yes."

"And then we may be able to persuade her to remain."

"I'll think it over; but see here, why is it you are so anxious to get possession of the girl?"

"I do not wish to see one so lovely and beautiful living in such a miserable condition."

"See here, Garcia, do you mean that girl harm?"

"Why, old man, what could prompt you to ask that question?"

"Well, I'll tell you, you're so anxious; 'tis just come over my mind that you don't mean just what's right. Now, see here; it wouldn't do for you to mean any harm to Renie. I'd follow any man who would harm her to the very death!"

As the old smuggler spoke he drew his knife from his belt and laid it on the table in a suggestive manner.

"You can trust the girl with me; but where is she to-night?"

"Can't tell, sir; nights like these she likes to roam the beach; she's a strange girl, sir, but I'd never have any harm come to her!"

"Will you consent to bring her to New York on a visit?"

"I'll think the matter over, and—"

The further remarks of the old smuggler were cut short by a shrill scream of agony which broke the stillness of the night.

CHAPTER VII.

THE two men stopped and listened a moment, when Tom Pearce started to go toward the door, exclaiming:

"Something has scared Renie!"

"Hold on! Nothing is the matter with the girl," said Garcia.

"How do you know?" retorted the old smuggler; and he made another step toward the door, when the man Garcia suddenly dealt him a blow with a club.

The blow was a powerful one, and it brought the old man to the floor, which laid him insensible upon the broad of his back.

Meantime, the detective had overheard the scream, and had slid away from his hiding-place, and started to run toward the point from whence the cry had come.

Spencer Vance was convinced that the scream had been uttered by Renie, and, remembering Sol Burton's attack upon the girl, he suspected the man had renewed his attempt.

The detective ran for some distance, and saw no one; and his anxiety became intense lest some real harm had befallen the helpless girl. He could not understand what had become of her. When he first heard the cry, it did not appear as though the screamer could be more than a few hundred feet distant from where he lay ensconced; but he had covered thousands of square feet, and could see nothing of the girl, or, indeed, was there a living soul visible.

The detective was straining his eyes in glances in every direction when he caught sight of the figure of a man moving stealthily across the sand.

The detective started to follow the man, and speedily discerned that the stealthy prowler was the man Garcia.

The latter had not seen the detective, and our hero kept upon his track, following him to the shore. On the beach were gathered a group of men, and in their midst Vance beheld the girl Renie.

At a glance the detective took in the situation. Garcia, despairing of success with the old smuggler, had determined to kidnap the girl.

There were three men besides the man Garcia, and four to one was pretty good odds; besides, the detective knew the men to be desperate and well prepared to fight. What should he do? He could not stand by and see the fair, helpless girl carried off; and yet he was alone, and had no one to call upon for assistance.

Lying off the shore was a sloop-yacht, and on the beach was a boat; the intention of the men was apparent. It was their purpose to carry the girl off to the yacht.

Spencer Vance was an experienced officer, well posted in all the tricks and devices of his craft, and he at once began to carry out a scheme.

He took up a position behind a sand-rift, and commenced to shriek and scream like a woman; and a moment later he became aware that his *ruse* was successful; two men came running toward the place where he lay concealed, and as they approached the detective leaped to his feet. He had the men at a disadvantage; they were not expecting an attack, and were unprepared.

The detective, however, was ready to receive them as they ran down the incline, and quick as lightning sprung upon the two men. The men were both stunned, and were down before they had a chance to make an outcry.

Having disposed of the two men, the detective advanced toward the point on the beach where the two remaining men stood. He walked straight up to the kidnappers, who stood and gazed at him in amazement.

"Heh, Renie!" he called, "are you going willingly with these men?"

The men answered for the girl:

"Yes; she is going with us. Who are you, and what have you got to say about it?"

"When I speak, it will be from these; you fellows get in your boat or I fire!"

"Who are you?" came the question.

"Get in your boat, and leave, or down you go! The other two chaps are settled."

"But give us an explanation."

One of the men made a movement to draw his weapon, but the detective called:

"Hold on there, my friend! And now, you fellows, get in your boat, or at the call of three it will be too late!"

"One!" called the detective, and he made one step nearer the men.

"Two!" he called a second later, and he advanced another step.

The men did not wait for the third call, but leaped into their boat.

The detective advanced to the spot where Renie stood, and in a low voice, he said:

"Am I right?"

The girl made no reply.

A suspicion of the truth flashed through the detective's mind, and he said:

"Renie, run to your father's cabin, the road is clear!"

The girl, who had stood speechless during the whole time that the exciting incidents we have described were transpiring, suddenly bounded away, but without speaking one word.

The detective called to the two men in the boat:

"Don't you fellows land again, or it will cost you your lives!"

The men made no reply, and the detective moved away in the same direction that had been pursued by Renie. He had gone less than a hundred feet, when he met the girl coming toward him.

The detective was both amused and pleased. He realized that in case of an emergency the girl would be of great help.

"Never mind, my child, I've settled 'em!" he said.

Still the girl made no reply, and it was then the detective discovered that she had been gagged. He also discovered that her arms had been secured, so she could not raise them to her head.

It took him but a moment to release her with his knife, when she exclaimed:

"I thank you for coming to my aid; but where are the villains?"

"I reckon they've gone off to their boat; but come, we will see. With such a noble and brave ally I would not hesitate to invite a scrimmage with half a dozen of them."

The detective's guess proved correct. The two men whom he had first dropped had evidently recovered their senses, and had joined their pals on the beach, as a boat bearing four persons could be seen moving off toward the yacht.

As our readers can well imagine, it was not because of the detective's warning that the men pulled away to their boat. Garcia remembered that he had stricken down the old smuggler, and it was the consequences of that act which made him anxious to get away.

"There they go, Renie!"

"Yes; thanks to you, I am not going with them;" answered the girl.

"Why was the assault made upon you, my child?"

"You are my friend; I will tell you all now. That man Garcia is a villain! He has made all manner of propositions to me to induce me to leave the coast and go to the city with him, but I knew the man to be a villain, a murderer, and criminal of the worst sort, and I refused all his offers."

"On what pretense did he make offers to you, my child?"

"Oh, he told me I was fitted to adorn a mansion, that this life with these rough fishermen was no life for me, and that he would take me to live as his child in luxury and splendor."

"In one respect, Renie, the man told you truly. You are not fitted to dwell among these rough men around here."

"I know that well enough, but I will not leave my father, and when I do I shall not place myself under the protection of a man like Garcia."

"Who is this man Garcia?"

"He is a Cuban, or rather his father was a Cuban, and his mother, as I've heard him say, was an Irish lady. I think he is one of the capitalists engaged in the smuggling trade; and that he is a villain and scoundrel I know!"

"He had a long interview with Tom Pearce to-night."

"Yes; I requested you to be a listener to their talk. What did you overhear?"

"Tom Pearce is an honest and good man, as far as you are concerned; the fellow Garcia was seeking with the offer of bribes to induce the old man to take you to New York and surrender you to his keeping. He used the same arguments with your father that he used with you."

"And what did my father say to his propositions?"

"He gave no decided answer; but one thing is certain, the old man would never surrender you to that fellow if he had the least suspicion that any harm would come to you."

"What has occurred this night will convince him, I reckon."

"Yes, I should say so," responded the detective.

"I would not have gone to that man's house even had my father consented. I have a mind and will of my own; and now that I am on my guard I will take care of myself against any such attacks in future."

"I don't know, Renie; I do not think you will be safe here."

"The men around here will protect me."

At that moment a diminutive shadow was cast on the sand in front of Renie and the detective, and a moment later a little fellow, a mere child seemingly in years, appeared before them.

"Hello, Tommy, where did you come from?" demanded Renie.

"I want to speak to you, Renie."

"Well, speak out, Tommy."

"I won't speak before any one. I've awful news to tell you."

"Go and hear what the lad has to say to you," suggested Vance.

Renie stepped aside with the lad, when the latter whispered in a low tone:

"Sol Burton has made trouble."

"What has he done?"

"He told the men that you gave that man warning, and they're awful mad at you, and they've put up a job to get the man into a quarrel."

"Where are the men now?"

"Down to Rigby's."

"They expect the detective down there to-night?"

"Yes."

"And Sol Burton was the man who told them I gave the detective warning?"

"Yes."

"You go down to Rigby's and listen to what goes on, and in about an hour come up and report to me."

"Where will you be?"

"At the cabin."

Tom Pearce's house was generally called the cabin, as the timbers and other materials of which it was constructed were portions of a wreck that had come ashore many years previously.

Tommy bid the girl good-night, and the latter returned to the detective.

"Well, is the communication confidential?"

"You are in great peril."

"Am I?"

"You are."

"From which quarter does the danger threaten me?"

"Sol Burton has reported against me."

"What has he reported?"

"He has told the men that I warned you, and that is the reason you did not go off in the yacht."

"The men will not harm you, I reckon."

"No, they will not harm me."

"Then I reckon no harm is done."

"The men have sworn to get square with you to-night!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE detective laughed in a quiet way, and said:

"My dear child, I have been in hotter danger than any that threatens me at this moment. I know now in which quarter the danger lies, and I would be a poor man were I to be frightened off when holding that 'lead.'"

"But those men are set to catch you to-night. They have sworn to assault you, and there are twenty of them, all told; you may treat the danger lightly, but I tell you they are a desperate lot. They will make good their threat unless you go. It will be impossible for you to stand against them all."

"Never you fear for me, Renie; I'll go off in the yacht to-night. She catches a 'liner,' and don't you forget."

"You will go off in the yacht with those men?" exclaimed the girl.

"Yes, I will."

"Never! they will go for you at sight! They know now that you have been warned."

"I will look out for myself; it is not my peril we must consider, but yours."

"I am safe. I shall tell all to my father, and after that it will be a dangerous thing for Garcia to show his face around our cabin."

"The man has money, he will operate by trick and device. He will bribe some one whom you consider your best friend to aid him, and already you have an enemy."

"Sol Burton?"

"Yes."

"I do not fear him. I'll scare that man over to the mainland, to remain there, before to-morrow's sunset. No, no! I am not in danger, but you are."

"You need have no fear for me."

"You will not go to Rigby's to-night?"

"I may go down there."

"And invite your doom?"

The detective smiled as he answered:

"I can depend upon you?"

"How depend upon me?"

"You will not give any information against me?"

"I certainly will not."

"You must not know anything about me when you are questioned, but you can suggest that, possibly, I have become scared, and sail away."

"Why do you not go?"

"Go! why, my child, I'm getting right down to the business that brought me here; in a few days I'll have matters dead to rights; and, while I think of it, let me warn you, do not let Tom Pearce go off any more."

"He does not got off nowadays. He has not been off in the yacht for a year. He is getting too old."

"Give him a warning."

"How warn him?"

"Tell him to lay low, that the officers have got all the points down good, and are about to close in; tell him he'll be safe if he lies quiet close from this time out."

"I will warn him; but, alas! it's you who should take warning. You know not your peril!"

"We will drop that matter for the present. I have only one more word to say: You must know nothing about me, under any circumstances whatever; you must never seek to communicate with me, unless I first address you."

"I do not understand."

"It is not necessary for you to understand; you are a girl of ready wit; a general command to you is sufficient. I have good reasons for my request. I am amply able to take care of myself under all circumstances; my fear, as I told you, is for you. And now, to change the subject, have you any intimate friend, save your father?"

"Not one."

"Can I claim to be a friend of yours?"

The girl answered promptly:

"You have already proven yourself a friend."

"You remember the words addressed to you by Sol Burton?"

"Yes."

"That fellow, I am satisfied, has no information for you."

"I have so decided in my own mind."

"Will you confide in me as a friend?"

"I will!" came the ready reply.

"I have reason to know that there is a mystery connected with your commiittal, years ago, to the care of Mrs. Pearce."

"I know that myself."

"I can solve that mystery if you permit me to do so."

"I believe you can aid me; but if you go to Rigby's to-night you can never do service for me; these men will make good their threat!"

"We will not talk about me now; we will talk about you, and I wish to ask you one question: Were you with Mrs. Pearce when she died?"

"I was."

"Did she succeed in making any communication?"

"She did not."

"Not even one word?"

"She only succeeded in saying, 'Renie, I have something important to tell you;' then her tongue became paralyzed, and she never spoke again."

"Upon no former occasion did she ever give you a hint?"

"Never."

"She never told you of the circumstances under which you were confided to her care?"

"Never."

"And she never spoke of a mysterious box

or any relics that might some day serve as identification tokens."

"Never. She always gave me to understand that she was my real mother."

"Well, now, Renie, I wish to ask you some very important questions, and I desire that you will think and consider well before you make a reply."

"I have a good memory; but, first, tell me what was the purport of the conversation between my father and the man Garcia?"

"We will not speak of that now."

"There were revelations made?"

"Yes."

"And you will repeat them to me?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Some day."

"Why not now?"

"I will answer you frankly. I have determined, as I told you, to solve the mystery connected with your consignment to the care of Mrs. Pearce, and I do not wish to tell you anything that will start any suggestions in your mind, until I have collected and considered all the little memories you may have retained of the habits of your supposed mother."

"Her habits were ordinary and commonplace enough. She was merely a good, hard-working fisherman's wife."

"But did she not act like a woman who possessed a secret?"

The girl was thoughtful for some moments.

"I do remember a strange incident that once occurred when I was quite a girl."

"Ah! now we are getting down to it. Relate the incident."

"My reputed mother is buried in the graveyard on the mainland, beside the grave of her son."

"Yes."

"Well, once she visited his grave with me, and as she stood weeping, she said, after fixing her eyes on me in a strange manner:

"'Renie, some day from that grave may come forth a strange secret; the day may come when I will tell you about it.'"

CHAPTER IX.

THE detective was keenly interested at once.

"Were you old enough to consider her remark seriously?"

"Yes; I formed an idea as to her meaning."

"What was your idea?"

"'She alluded to the resurrection of the dead. She was what they called a Millerite."

"Yes; I have heard of those people—a strange sect, who believed the world was coming to an end about every three months. So you thought she alluded to the resurrection?"

"Yes."

"Did she visit her son's grave often?"

"No."

"Did you ever notice that her mind took any particular line of thought after these visits?"

"No."

The detective was thoughtful a moment, but his meditations were rudely disturbed by the reappearance of the boy Tommy. The little fellow had been running hard, and was almost breathless as he called to Renie:

"Come, quick! I've something to tell you."

The girl stepped aside with the lad, when the latter said:

"They're coming for him."

"For whom?"

"That man."

The lad pointed toward the detective.

"Who is coming?"

"The crew of the 'Nancy.' They're all wild drunk, and they're sure to try to hurt him."

"How do they know he is here?"

"Some one ran in the tavern and told 'em."

"Who was it?"

"I don't know. I was down there 'laying around' on the watch, when a man ran in and whispered something to the big mate, and then the men all took a 'stiff 'un,' and with oaths and curses started to go to your daddy's cabin. I ran ahead of them to warn you off."

"They will not harm me."

"No; but they are after him sure!" again the lad pointed toward the detective.

"All right, Tommy, you go and watch them, we'll look out."

Renie returned to where the detective stood, and said:

"Come with me, we've not a moment to spare."

"What's the matter now?"

"The gang have learned that you are still on the coast; they are all mad drunk, and they're coming for you!"

"Which way are the men coming?"

"They are going to my father's cabin, and if they do not find you there they will commence a search for you; they're all mad with liquor, and should they find you, no power on earth can save you!"

"Nonsense! they can not harm me. I only fear for you; and now listen, I've other work around here beyond the duty of breaking up the gang of smugglers. I'm going to solve the mystery of your life, fathom the secret of Betsy Pearce, and mark my words, I'll succeed!"

"Oh, do not remain here to-night! listen, they are almost upon us! fly with me! I can place you in a hiding-place!"

"If I lose my life to-night, it will be your fault, Renie!"

"My fault?"

"Yes."

"How so?"

"Because you will not do as I say."

"What shall I do?"

"Go to your father's cabin, and deny all knowledge of me."

"You demand that I shall leave you?"

"Yes."

"I go at your command!"

The girl glided away.

Meantime the detective heard loud voices and signs of intense excitement over at the boatman's cabin, which was not more than six hundred feet distant from where the detective and Renie stood, while the conversation which we have repeated was in progess.

Strange feelings were raging in the detective's bosom at that moment. He had known the beautiful barefooted girl but a few hours, and he had come to feel more interest in her than he had ever cherished for any other human being since the day he had laid his widowed mother to rest in the church-yard.

When he had first glanced at the girl under the exciting circumstances of that truly eventful night, he had considered her a rustic beauty, handsome, but ignorant; but alas! a better knowledge of her taught him that she was a refined and educated girl, despite the fact of the bare feet, her unkempt hair, and long residence among the fishermen and smugglers of the coast.

She was a true child of romance, a wonderful prodigy of a strange and weird fate, and he could not but picture to himself what a ravishingly lovely creature she would be under different auspices; and he wondered not that the Cuban villain, Garcia, was anxious to secure possession of her.

The detective quickly thought over the whole matter. He discerned the Cuban's purpose; the man meant to take the girl to Cuba, perchance, to make her his wife, and why not? She was beautiful, and there was a possibility that she might develop into a great heiress.

The detective, however, did not have much time to meditate on his strange meeting with the girl and the stranger incidents that followed that meeting. He was warned that it was necessary for him to take measures for the safety of his life.

Spencer Vane was a thoroughly experienced detective. He was no tyro at the business, and he was up to all the tricks and devices of the modern science of criminal detection. He was as good at the art of disguise as any in the profession, and it was his skill in the latter particular which made him so indifferent as to the approach of the gang of madly drunken smugglers.

Our hero walked over behind a high sand drift, and in a few minutes had worked a most startling and extraordinary "transform;" no living man, unless posted as to his disguise, could over have recognized in the dark-faced, rough-looking man who issued from behind the drift, the same light-haired, dashing-looking fellow who had a moment before disappeared behind it.

CHAPTER X.

THE detective had just completed his change in appearance, when he was startled by hearing a shrill piercing scream in a female voice from the direction of Tom Pearce's cabin.

"As I feared!" he muttered, and he walked rapidly toward the cabin, and approaching, he saw an excited group of men standing outside, while something of a more ordinary character appeared to be transpiring beneath the humble roof.

The detective approached the group of men standing outside and inquired:

"Hello, what's going on here?"

The men crowded around the new-comer, and glared in his face, and one of the men called out:

"Ahoy there, bring a glim here, quick! Here's a stranger, and by all that's fatal, I believe Tom's enemy!"

The detective was perfectly cool as he answered:

"Will you tell me what's going on here?"

"Who are you, anyhow?" came the query in a rough tone.

Meantime one of the men had brought out a ship's lantern, and it was held up in front of the detective's face, and the men glared at him.

"Do any of you know this fellow?" came the question.

One man after another declared his utter ignorance of the identity of the stranger.

"Who are you, my man?" again came the question.

"My name is Ballard, but I reckon no one around here knows me."

"I reckon you're right, you villain! and now what brings you here?"

"I came here to see a woman named Betsy Pearce."

"You came here to see a woman named Betsy Pearce?"

"Yes."

"What brought you here to see Betsy Pearce?"

"That's my business."

"You've been here before, to-night, old man!"

"Who says so?"

"We all do."

"Then you are all mistaken!"

"We are, eh? Well, my friend, it stands you in hand to give an account of yourself, and explain your presence here, or to-morrow's sun will never rise before your eyes!"

"Will you men explain why I am assailed this way?"

"My friend, Tom Pearce, has been found in his cabin unconscious!"

The detective gave a start, and a shudder passed over his stalwart frame. The start and shudder were the result of far different causes than the men around him supposed, but they noticed his momentary agitation, and one of them exclaimed:

"We've got the right man! And now, boys, get a rope; there'll be no foolin' *in this case!*"

Meantime one of the men entered the cabin and whispered to Renie, who was weeping over the body of her murdered father:

"They've caught the rascal, miss, and they're going to hang him!"

The girl uttered a scream, a wild piercing wail of anguish and terror! At that terrible moment it flashed across her mind that the men had caught Spencer Vance, and had concluded that the detective was the assailant of her father.

The girl rushed from the cabin screaming:

"Hold! Hold! do not harm that man! He is innocent! Hold! Hold, I say!"

The girl advanced to the center of the group of men that surrounded the detective, still exclaiming:

"Do not harm that man! he is innocent! He is innocent!"

She approached close to the prisoner; one of the men held up the lantern so its gleam shone full in the detective's face, and he inquired:

"Do you know him, Renie?"

The girl fixed her eyes on the prisoner and recoiling, exclaimed:

"No, no, I do not know him! I thought it was another man! *He must be the one!*"

As the excited girl spoke she pointed toward the detective.

The latter still stood, the coolest party amidst all there assembled.

Renie had taken but a cursory glance at the prisoner. One glance had been sufficient to prove to her that it was not the detective, and observing the man's swarthy complexion she connected him with the Cuban Garcia, and it was the latter fact which in the excitement of the moment caused her to exclaim:

"He must be the one!"

As stated, the detective was perfectly cool, but he realized his position in all its terribleness, and more fully, when one of the men said:

"Now, then, stranger, give an account of yourself."

"I tell you I came here to see Betsy Pearce."

"You were not at this cabin before to-night."

"I was not."

"Where do you hail from?"

"That's my business."

"That means you won't tell?"

"Yes."

"You may be sorry anon, good man; and now answer! What was your business with Betsy Pearce?"

"I will not answer."

"You had no business with Tom Pearce?"

"I did not."

"Stranger, your story don't work. Betsy Pearce has been dead and in her grave these two years."

"I know that!"

"Ah, you knew it?"

"Yes, I learned so since my arrival on the coast."

Renie had returned to the interior of the cabin, and one of the men said:

"Is the rope ready?"

"Yes," came the answer.

"Do you hear that, stranger?"

"I do."

"Rig a swing cross, boys. We'll fix this fellow, and teach all comers that this is the wrong coast for such scoundrels!"

The detective fully realized the men were in earnest, and that, unless some fortunate accident intervened, it would indeed be an "up you go" with him.

It would be hard to conceive a more embarrassing and critical position. The detective could not appeal to Renie openly, as the appeal would reveal his real identity; and no opportunity appeared for a quiet revelation of himself to the girl.

He was led to the place of execution; the rope was thrown over his head, when Renie came forth from the cabin. She ran forward to where the victim stood.

"Hold! Hold!" she said, "what are you about to do?"

"Hang your father's assailant!"

"Does the man confess his guilt?"

"No."

"Let me speak to him."

The girl pressed forward close to the doomed man, and addressing him, said:

"Are you innocent or guilty?"

"It makes no difference now; but tell me are you Renie Pearce?"

"I am Renie Pearce."

"I have an important communication to make to you before I die."

"To me?"

"Yes."

"Well, speak!"

"What I communicate must be spoken in your ear alone, as it concerns you only."

"Go and see what he has to say," commanded the leader of the lynching party.

The girl stepped close to the man and the lyncher stepped back.

In a low tone the detective said:

"Be calm and do not betray that you know me!"

The girl felt her heart stand still, and a cry rose to her lips.

"Hold," whispered the officer, "or you will destroy all chances for escape."

The girl's face assumed the hue of death, a thrilling suspicion flashed through her mind.

"You can save me, Renie, but if you betray my real identity I am doomed!"

"Are you Spencer Vance?"

"Yes."

"Heavens! what does this mean?"

"It is no time for explanations now; tell me, is your father dead?"

"He shows signs of life."

"Then you can save my life."

"You shall not die!"

"Listen, tell the men I have made certain revelations to you; tell them your father is reviving; bid them wait and let the old man identify me as the assailant, or proclaim my innocence."

"I see! I see!" said the girl.

"Remember, under no circumstances, even though I die, must my identity be betrayed!"

"You can trust me."

The girl stepped toward the men, and addressing them, said:

"You must not hang that man!"

"Is the man your friend?" came the question in a jeering tone.

"The man is a stranger; but I am satisfied he did not strike down my father. He has told me important things; my father revives, let my father see this man!"

At the moment there came a fortunate diversion in favor of the policy of delay: a voice called in from the house:

"Come here, Renie, your father is reviving. He has called for you!"

"Bring the man to my father," said the girl.

"Yes," came the answer from several.

"Throw the rope off from around his neck."

A young man stepped forward and did as commanded.

The sentiment was turning in favor of the seemingly doomed man.

CHAPTER XI.

It was an exciting moment when the detective was led into the cabin; as many as could get in, crowded into the low-ceiled room.

The old man had rapidly revived, his only attendant being an old man-of-war's-man, who had had a large experience with wounded men.

The detective meantime was quite confident; conscious of his innocence he welcomed the inspection.

The wounded man opened his eyes and gazed around the room.

"Where am I?" he demanded.

Renie stepped to his side and said:

"You are in your own cabin, father."

The old man gazed around wildly at the pale faces gathered around his bed; the detective was led forward and the old smuggler's glance fell upon the dark face. Suddenly the wounded man uttered a thrilling cry, rose up in the bed to a sitting position, and pointing his finger at the detective, demanded in a hoarse voice:

"Why is he here? take him away!"

The group gathered around the bed were paralyzed to silence, but after a moment the silence was broken by the voice of the leader of the gang of lynchers who asked:

"Who is he, Tom?"

In clear distinct tones the answer came:

"The villain who struck me down!"

Renie uttered a scream, and oaths fell from the lips of the men.

"Out with him! out with him!" came the cry, and oaths and curses and shouts of vengeance filled the air.

The men started to turn the detective toward the door, determined to hang him without further hinderance or delay.

The wounded man as he uttered the fatal words had fallen back, seemingly into a dead faint.

It was a terrible moment; the maddened men had reached the door with their prisoner when Renie called out in a frantic voice:

"Hold! do not take him away, my father has a word to say to him."

The girl's quick wit and readiness of expedient were wonderful.

At first, when the fatal words fell from her father's lips, her blood ran cold with horror; but quickly came the recollection that the detective had changed his appearance, and that she herself had failed to recognize him. Garcia was a dark-complexioned man, and the thought came to her that there was a possibility that, in a moment of excitement and bewilderment, the injured old smuggler had mistaken the detective for Garcia.

Her device to stay the maddened men was a rare example of quickness of thought at a critical moment; indeed, it was the only appeal that would have caused the men to delay their fell purpose.

Tom Pearce was still unconscious, and Renie threw herself upon the old man, pretending to caress him, so as to hide the fact of his unconsciousness and to gain time until he should revive.

At length, the old smuggler did revive, and Renie whispered the inquiry in his ear:

"Father, who was it struck you down?"

"Garcia!" came the response in a husky voice.

Gladness gleamed in the girl's eyes.

The men brought the detective to the bedside.

"Wait, wait a moment!" commanded Renie.

"What does the old man wish to say to the villain?"

"Wait, wait until he more fully revives."

Some of the men who were outside, not understanding the cause of the delay, called out:

"Bring the man out!"

Meantime, the old man more fully revived, when Renie whispered to him:

"Father, do you know me?"

"Yes; it is Renie, my child."

"Do you remember pointing out the man who assailed you?"

"Yes; it was that villain Garcia."

"The man whom you denounced was not Garcia."

"Was it not Garcia whom they brought before me?"

"No."

"Who was it?"

"A stranger."

"I made a mistake!"

"Yes; you made a mistake. Will you not look again at the man?"

"Certainly I will."

"Will you rise up in bed?"

"Yes."

Renie assisted the old man to rise, and beckoned the men to lead the detective forward.

"Now, father," she said, "look upon this man."

The old smuggler looked the detective all over, and a change came over his face as he said:

"Is that the man I denounced?"

"Yes."

"My friends, that is not the man who assailed me!"

The gang of lynchers stood gazing in amazement, and there was a suspicious look upon the faces of many of them as their leader remarked:

"The girl has cajoled him."

The men suspected that the girl had induced her father to recall his words.

"Would you know the man who assailed you, Tom?"

"Yes."

"Then why did you accuse this man?"

"I had not fully recovered my senses when I denounced him."

"Do you know the right man?"

"Yes," came the answer.

"Are you sure you have your senses now?"

"Yes."

"This man is really innocent?"

"He is."

"That settles it, stranger. We owe you an apology; but you had a narrow 'squeak' of it, and but for the gal, you'd have been dangling now from yonder spar."

Turning to the wounded man, the fellow continued:

"Tom, who was the man who assailed you?"

"I know him."

"You're going to die; tell us, old man, who did the deed?"

The old man-of-war's-man, who had been attending the wounded smuggler, exclaimed:

"Die, is it? Not he! Tom Pearce is good for a three-years' cruise yet; and he'd a mind to take it!"

"Well, tell us who the man was, Tom?"

"No, boys, not now; it was a private quarrel. I'm coming around all right, and I'm much obliged for the good feeling you men have shown toward me; but I'll settle with the man who downed me—settle with him good, and no mistake!"

"All right, you have your own way, but when you're around again, we want to have a talk with you; and, meantime, Renie, I've a few words to say to you in private."

"You want to talk to me, Ike Denman?"

"Yes."

"Well, speak out."

"Clear out, boys; you know what business you have on hand; get down to work, and if you fail, I'll meet you at Rigby's later on."

The men moved away, the detective going with them; and a few moments later Renie, Denman, and the old smuggler were alone.

"Renie," said Denman, "haven't we always treated you well?"

"I've never complained of the treatment I've received on the coast."

"Then, why have you turned against us?"

"I've not turned against you."

"Go slow, girl, go slow! Don't say anything you'll have to take back."

"I know just what I'm saying."

"There's been an enemy on the coast."

"A Government officer?"

"Yes; a Government officer."

"Who warned him he was in danger?"

"Who first learned he was a Government officer?"

"That's neither here nor there. Who warned him not to go off in the yacht this night?"

"I did."

"You did?"

"Yes."

"Why did you do so?"

"I did not want to see the man murdered."

"Who told you the man would be murdered?"

Ike Denman fixed his keen eyes sharply on the girl when he asked the question.

"No one told me."

"See here, girl, do not tell me that!"

"You have my answer."

"Renie, before to-night I would have taken your word for anything; but now I doubt you!"

"I can't help it, I have told you the truth."

"Some one must have told you our plans?"

"No one told me."

"And what did you tell the detective?"

"I told him not to go off in the yacht to-night."

"What more did you tell him?"

"I told him to leave the coast."

"What reason did you give him for warning him not to go off in the yacht?"

"I told him he'd never return alive."

"That's frank and straight."

"I always tell the truth."

"And now, girl, we have something worse than a Government officer on the coast."

The girl remained silent, and Denman continued:

"A traitor is worse than a Government officer, and we have a traitor in our midst."

The girl still remained silent. She supposed the fellow was alluding to her.

"Renie, you must tell me who told you our plans?"

"No one told me your plans."

"Listen, girl, I want to keep you out of trouble; let me tell you something; the men are very much incensed against you, and have uttered terrible threats."

"I can't help it."

"Why did you warn the detective?"

"I did not wish to see the man murdered."

"And you turned against your father and us all?"

"I have turned against no one. I only sought to save a man's life."

"The man is a friend of yours?"

"I never spoke to him before in my life, until I warned him of his danger."

"Where is the man?"

"If he is wise, he has left the coast."

"Will you tell me how you have learned of our plans?"

"I overheard you discuss them."

"And you are the traitor?"

"I am the traitor!"

"Girl, never confess to any one else what you have confessed to me!"

The old smuggler was a listener to the foregoing conversation, and he said:

"Renie is tender-hearted."

"Yes; but, Tom, Renie must go away."

"Yes; she is going away."

"Have you a place for her?"

"Yes."

"Will you tell me who assailed you?"

"Ike, I can't tell you all; but I was assailed on Renie's account."

"You were assailed on Renie's account?"

"Yes."

"This is a strange story!"

"Some day you will know why I was assailed."

"Was it one of our people?"

"No."

"A stranger?"

"Yes."

"Who?"

"A man you know."

"Name him."

"Not to-night."

"When will Renie go away?"

"As soon as possible."

"Tom, I am a friend of yours, and your daughter's; but I tell you the girl is in a bad fix."

"She shall go away."

"To-morrow?"

"We shall see."

Ike Denman remained to exchange a few more words, and went away; the father and daughter were alone.

The girl told of the attempt to kidnap her.

"I see it all, Renie, I see it all! But you are safe, and you shall not come to harm; but tell me, who is the man who was brought before me?"

The girl was saved an answer, for the man walked in to answer for himself.

CHAPTER XII.

RENIE was surprised to see the detective enter the cabin.

"Tom Pearce," said our hero, "I am a stranger to you and yours, but I am your friend. I can not tell you who I am at present, but in good time you shall know all!"

"How was it you were suspected of having assailed me?" asked the old smuggler.

"I was coming to your cabin to ask some questions, when, as a stranger, who could give no satisfactory account of himself, I was arrested."

Renie had told her father that the detective had rescued her from the hands of Garcia and his men.

The old smuggler was not altogether satisfied with the young man's statement, as a suspicion ran through his mind that he was, after all, a secret emissary of the Cuban.

"You were coming to see me?" said the old smuggler.

"Yes."

"What is your business with me?"

"I can defer my business to some other time; the fact of your injury prevents me from troubling you now."

"Never mind my injury, I am all right now. I received many a worse thump when I was a younger man, but I am an old one now, and I tell you age will tell; but you can open your business."

"I am your friend, Tom Pearce."

"Many an enemy claims to be a man's friend."

"Had I known what I do now, you would never have been stricken down."

"I can tell you that had I known myself what I do now, I would never have been stricken down."

"The man Garcia is your enemy!"

"Eh? What's that you are saying?"

"I am telling you the man Garcia is your enemy!"

"What do you know about the man Garcia?"

"I know he is a villain!"

The old smuggler fixed his eyes on the young man, and said:

"Who sent you here?"

"No one."

"Why did you come here?"

"To warn you against Garcia."

The statement in various ways, as our readers will recognize, was the truth.

"You came here to warn me against Garcia?"

"Yes."

"Why should you come to warn me?"

"Because I know the man who assailed you to be a villain."

"The man who assailed me?"

"Yes."

"How do you know who assailed me?"

"I know him."

"How comes it that you are my friend? Why should you warn me? Have you known me before?"

"I never saw you until this night to my recollection."

"Then how is it you take such an interest in me?"

"My interest in you is because of Garcia's designs. I hate that man. I am on his track, and I am the friend of any man whom he is against!"

"Are you acquainted with my daughter?" asked the old smuggler in a suspicious tone.

"I never saw your daughter before to-night."

"How did you know Garcia was coming here?"

"I tracked him."

"Why did you track him?"

"Because I knew he was up to some villainy."

"You say the man is my enemy?"

"Would a friend assail you as you have been assailed this night?"

"How do you know Garcia assailed me?"

"I tracked him to this house, and a few moments after he left the house you were found lying unconscious in this room."

"Where were you when I was assaulted?"

"I was down at the bay shore."

"What were you doing there?"

"Watching the men whom Garcia brought with him to aid him in his design."

"This is a strange story you are telling me, young man. How do I know but you are an enemy?"

"I am not an enemy!"

"But are you an enemy to Garcia?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"That is a private matter."

"Why is he my enemy?"

The young man was silent, but looked toward Renie. The old smuggler followed the direction of his glance and said:

"Come, speak out plainly, do not fear!"

"I fear nothing."

"Then speak."

The young man reached over the bed and whispered in the old man's ear:

"I do not wish to speak in your daughter's presence."

"Renie, go from the cabin a few moments, this man has something to tell me."

The detective signaled to the girl to obey, but the latter showed some hesitancy and said:

"Father, I do not wish to leave you alone with a stranger."

"You need not fear, child, and you can remain within call."

"Are you sure this is not the man who assaulted you?"

"Yes, child. I know well enough who assailed me; go away, I will call you when I wish you to return."

The girl went from the room, but at the same time exhibited considerable reluctance.

The detective's admiration for the girl increased. He recognized that she was playing a part, and really aiding him in impressing the old man as intended.

When alone, the old smuggler said:

"Now, speak out, young man!"

"Do you suspect Garcia's purpose?"

"We are not talking about what I suspect, what have you to tell me?"

"Garcia has designs against your daughter; all his pretensions about desiring to benefit her are a part of his scheme. He is a deep dyed villain, a man capable of any crime."

"How do I know you are not one of his agents?"

"It wouldn't stand to reason that, if I were his agent, I would denounce him."

"That might be a part of his purpose."

"I warn you against the man; take nobody's advice; keep your daughter under your own special care."

"Why have you such an interest in my daughter?" demanded the old smuggler, abruptly, and again he fixed his eyes keenly on the detective.

"I am against Garcia, whatever his schemes may be; and now that I've warned you, I've nothing more to say; do as you choose, I owe you nothing, nor do you owe me anything; you can believe what I have told you or doubt it, just as you choose, but remember I have warned you!"

The detective started to leave the cabin, when the old man called him back and asked:

"What is your name?"

"My name is Ballard."

"Where are you from?"

"Cuba."

"Will I see you again?"

"You may; but let me tell you one thing, if you wish me to remain your friend, tell no man that I warned you against Garcia. I propose to hang around the coast for awhile."

"For what purpose?"

"To circumvent the villain Garcia. I may stand you in good need when you least expect it, if you permit me to be your friend."

CHAPTER XIII.

WITHOUT another word the detective departed from the cabin; a little distance across the sand he saw a figure. He recognized Renie and went toward her.

"I did not know you," said the girl.

"You may not know me the next time we meet."

"This is wonderful."

"I am a detective, I have made a study of the art of disguise; my success and my safety ofttimes depend upon my skill in changing my appearance at a moment's notice; but now, let me thank you for saving my life!"

"Saving your life!"

"Yes."

"It was for me you put your life in jeopardy."

"No, no, I am carrying out my own designs."

"You saved me from that man Garcia!"

"And you saved me from being hanged by those men."

"You will leave the coast now?"

"Leave the coast?"

"Yes."

"Well, I reckon not. I've just got down to business."

"You will be discovered; you will be in worse peril as the Government detective than you were as the supposed assailant of my father."

"I can take care of myself."

"And you will remain?"

"I will remain."

"You invite your doom."

"Well, well, I've often done the same thing before; I am in the way of duty. Renie, understand me, I am your friend. I will risk anything to guard you from evil, but it is my duty to break up this gang of smugglers, and I shall do my duty at any cost!"

"But I have betrayed you."

"Yes, I know all about it; your betrayal was not intentional; you are a brave, noble girl! tell me, are you in any way connected with the smugglers?"

"I am not."

"Then fear nothing."

"But my father?"

"Your father is not actively engaged as a smuggler now, and I will not get him into trouble, but I must do my duty, and now answer me frankly, are you against me?"

"How against you?"

"I have decided to remain and do my duty. I am the enemy of th gang! Are you their friend? Will you stand between me and them?"

"Never! but I know you will never leave the coast alive! those men will not rest day or night until they run you down, and I can not aid you, as I have already earned their enmity, and they have demanded that I be sent away!"

"That is all right."

The girl laughed and said:

"It is easy enough to say 'that is all right,' but where shall I go?"

"Go with Tom Pearce."

"Tom Pearce will not leave the coast."

"Yes, he will."

"Did he tell you so?"

"No, but I will persuade him. I will show him very soon that it is best for him to go. He will go, never fear!"

"You will never persuade him."

"I will use an argument you do not dream of, my girl; and now, mark me, I am your friend. I have promised to solve the mystery surrounding your commission to the care of the Pearces many years ago. I will learn all about you, I will find the box."

"What box?"

The detective smiled as he remembered that the girl knew nothing about the box, and he said:

"Ah, that is a way we detectives have of speaking; the secret of your life is boxed somewhere, we would say, and I will unravel the mystery."

"Why should you take such an interest in me?"

"Did you not save my life?"

"But did you not imperil your life in my behalf?"

"No; I was in the way of duty when I fell into the hands of the smugglers under such peculiar circumstances; but never mind, we will not discuss that matter. I have seen fit to make you a promise, and I will make my promise good."

"Never! if you decide to remain on the coast."

"I shall remain! and now, Renie, as we are friends, let us arrange so as to guard against future perils. I may appear here under many disguises, it is necessary for both of us that you should always know and recognize me; but you must never betray your recognition; to you in the presence of others I must always be a stranger: your safety and my own demands it, but all will come out right in the end."

"Never! Never! those men will kill you!"

"I shall go to sea with those men before tomorrow's sunset."

"You will never return."

"Oh, yes I will; and now listen."

The detective proceeded and arranged a number of secret signs and signals with the girl. He instructed her in a private finger code, and found her a ready and apt scholar. He gave her also a written chart for future study, telling her that if she mastered it, they could converse in the presence of others, and none would be the wiser.

Having concluded his instructions, he said:

"Go now to your father. I may not see you for two or three days, but always be on your guard."

"Against whom?"

"Garcia."

"Do you think he will dare return?"

"That man may have secret agents among the smugglers."

"None of the men would betray me to him."

"We can not tell what money may accomplish; but I do not anticipate danger for a few days, or I would not leave you; still you must be on your guard."

"Where go you now?"

"To Rigby's."

"To Rigby's?" ejaculated the girl.

"Yes; why not?"

"You go at your peril!"

The detective laughed and said:

"Never fear for me; good-night!"

Without waiting to listen to further words of warning the detective walked rapidly away.

Renie returned to the cabin; the girl was disturbed and thoughtful. The dream of her lonely life was opening up to her, but alas! the picture was fringed with dark surroundings.

Upon entering the cabin the girl was addressed by her father, who asked:

"Renie, what do you think of that fellow?"

"He is a mysterious man, father, but he appears to be friendly to us."

"He has spoken nothing but the truth, so far, my child. Garcia is a villain! it was he who assailed me."

"How was it he came to assail you, father?"

"My child, that man has designs against you; it is time that I told you all I know concerning yourself!"

"Do so, father."

The old smuggler proceeded and related to Renie all that he had told to Gracia, and also stated the Cuban's proposition.

The girl was silent, but deeply interested, and the one thought that ran through her mind was the knowledge that Spencer Vance had overheard the revelation when made to Garcia.

The old man had just concluded his narrative when an intruder walked into the cabin.

CHAPTER XIV.

A RECKLESS gang of men were assembled in the low tavern kept by a man named Rigby.

The latter was a remarkable man. He kept a low seashore resort, a place where fishermen and the roughest sort of men gathered, and yet he was a man of considerable education and a great deal of cunning, and coined more good money in this little seaside tavern then did other rumsellers who occupied saloons in the great city, that cost thousands to fit up and decorate.

Rigby was too cunning and careful to be a smuggler himself, but he was also cunning enough to "scoop in" the major portion of the earnings of the men engaged in the perilous trade.

It was only when the business had grown to large proportions that the Government organized a regular plan for its suppression; and at the time our story opens, the play between the smugglers and the Government agents was at its finest point. It was well known that there were parties in New York who had, and were still realizing immense sums of money by cheating the Government of its legitimate revenue.

The Collector of the Port did not care so much about the crews of the vessels, it was the owners and capitalists he was seeking to trail down.

The smugglers had given over the search for Spencer Vance, and in parties of twos and threes, had gathered at Rigby's, until at least fifteen or twenty men were assembled. They were all smugglers and members of the crew of the smuggler yacht "Nancy."

As intimated in our opening chapters, the men ostensibly were fishermen, and their boat was stated to be a fishing-boat; and to lend color to the claim, the men did go off between times on fishing expeditions, and the latter little trick had been their best "blind" and "throw off."

Again, as intimated in our former chapters, three Government officers had mysteriously disappeared, and the duty had devolved upon the Government officials not only to stay the illegal traffic, but to ferret out and bring to punishment the murderers of the missing detectives.

There was no actual proof, however, that the men were murdered; as far as the Government officials were advisedly concerned, the detectives were merely *missing*. It was reported by some "Smart Alec" that the detectives had been put on outgoing vessels bound for some distant port, and that in good season they would turn up, and then again there was the chance that the officers might have met with accidents in their perilous undertaking.

Spencer Vance, however, was fully satisfied in his own mind that his brother officers had been murdered. He knew too well that tragic events are of constant occurrence which never come to light; tragedies so terrible that were the details to be known, a thrill of horror would go throughout the whole land.

There are horrors enough that do become public, but there are as many more that never come to the surface.

The men, as stated, gathered at Rigby's; they had just returned from a search for Spencer Vance.

There was no doubt in their minds as to the truth of the report that he was a spy in their midst. The fact that he had declined to go out on the yacht that night was to them proof as clear as "Holy Writ" that he was a Government officer.

It was important to catch him and put him out of the way as soon as possible, as there were several very valuable shipments on the way to New York, and chances favored the men for making quite large sums of money.

Our readers must not understand that the vessel engaged in the smuggling business carried no other freight; the goods intended to be smuggled in was but a small part of their cargo, but amounted on each vessel to enough to yield enormous profits to the capitalists as well as to the actual smuggler crews.

One of the men, as he drunk off a glass of grog, remarked:

"Boys, it's a cold day for us that the fellow should have received a warning; it's money out of our pockets!"

There was a one-eyed, ugly visaged fellow sitting off in a corner of the room, who remarked:

"You lads will see colder days yet; you may say the business is all up, and we'd better take the 'Nancy' over to the mackerel banks and work for a few honest pennies."

"What makes you say that, Jake?"

"I'm only telling yer the truth; yer a chicken-hearted lot, and losing all yer game; for what? the pretty face of a she-devil!"

Too well the men all understood one-eyed Jake's savage suggestion.

"You don't think," said one of them, "that the gal is dead against us?"

"Well, I think she is as dead against us as a few dollars in gold can make a female who's fond of gewgaws, and ambitious to be a fine lady."

"Do you mean to say Renie receives money?"

"Well, I don't think bad enough of the gal to say she'd go agin us for fun. I tell you, boys, the thing is dead agin us unless the gal is silenced!"

The men all entered loud protests; the girl was a great favorite yet with most of them, as she had grown up in their midst.

"Oh, I expected you'd growl when you learned the truth, and it's the gal or us; as you all think so much of the gal, I propose we lay provision in the 'Nancy,' and go off after mackerel."

"What would you propose, Jake?"

"I propose sending the gal away."

"You would do her no harm?"

"I wouldn't harm a hair of her head; but she's doing us a good deal of harm all the same."

"It's already been suggested to Tom Pearce to send the gal away."

"He'll never do it!"

"But he must."

"It's all right to say he must; but who'll make old Tom Pearce do a thing when he's made up his mind that he won't?"

"What would you propose?"

"I'd propose that we smuggle the gal."

"How smuggle her?"

"Take her out on the 'Nancy,' and put her aboard some outgoing vessel as a passenger."

"That wouldn't do, Jake?"

"Then let's go mackerel-fishing, for the other trade is knocked dead in the head."

The men were all drinking, and became more or less excited under the influence of the liquor.

Jake was a bad fellow at heart, but he was one of the most daring men in the crew of jolly smugglers, and the men had great confidence in his judgment.

"I tell you, boys, the gal must be disposed of, or she'll give information right; just see how we stand now: there's a boat due, there's a big haul for us, and this man has been in our midst

for two weeks or more, and he's got all the points and—" The man's further speech was interrupted by the entrance of a stranger.

CHAPTER XV.

THE man who suddenly entered in the midst of the speech of one-eyed Jake was Ballard, the man whom an hour or two previously that very gang of men had set to hang.

The crew of the "Nancy" gazed at the newcomer in astonishment, and a wicked gleam shone in the single eye of Jake.

"You're cheeky, stranger, to walk in here after what's just happened!"

The disguised detective laughed in a pleasant manner, and answered:

"That's just why I'm here; you fellows ought to be glad to see me knocking around alive, when you think how bad you would have felt had you swung me over the spar."

"We've no fancy for strangers around here!"

"Well, a man who's been following the sea all his life should not be a stranger among you fellows.

"Where have you sailed, stranger?"

"Better ask where I haven't sailed, and it won't take so long to pay out the information."

There was an off hand, jolly sort of style about the stranger which rather pleased the gang of smugglers.

"What brought you down this way?"

"I've been off for five years, and when I'm off on a voyage I'm clean gone; all the doors are closed behind me. I never get any letters, and I never send any, so it's all news to me when I come in from the sea; and I came down here to see my mother's cousin."

"Who is your mother's cousin, stranger?"

"Well, you fellows are running down close into a strange craft; my relative was old Aunt Betsy, Tom Pearce's wife."

"She's dead!"

"Well, so I know now; and I came near being sent after her; but all's well that ends well, so come, all hands, and have a little throat burner with me."

The men were all glad enough to step up and take a snifter with the stranger, who after so long a voyage they reckoned must have a pocketful of the "wherewithal."

We will not go further into the details of the methods pursued by the detective to worm himself into the confidence of the smugglers; it is sufficient to say that within two hours after his appearance in their midst he had won all their hearts.

Our readers can form some idea of the wonderful skill, coolness, and daring of the detective, who within twenty-four hours walked under a new disguise right into the midst of a gang of desperate men, who, had they recognized him as he was known but a few hours previously, would have killed him as they would have slain a venomous serpent.

A number of the men fell into a regular carouse with the detective; among them was Ike Denman, the captain of the yacht "Nancy." Indeed, the men got into a game of cards, and Ballard lost like a little man and stood his ill luck with such marvelous good nature, the men fell right to him.

When it was well into the morning, the game broke up, and Denman invited the detective to go aboard the yacht and bunk for the night.

Our hero gladly accepted the invitation; and when once aboard, as it was a pleasant morning, the two men lay out upon the deck, and Denman became quite confidential. He let the detective into the secret of the real business of the crew of the yacht, and told him that daily they were expecting a schooner from the West Indies with a big cargo for them.

"How do you run it ashore?" asked the detective, innocently.

"Make a trip with us and we'll show you how the thing is done; the fact is I'm a man or two short, and if you want to take a rake in with us you're welcome."

"That's just the ticket for me!" answered Spencer Vance.

Our readers must understand that the detective had been wonderfully diplomatic and cute to so readily worm himself into the confidence of Ike Denman.

The men at length went to sleep and slept far into the morning. Ike Denman was the first to awake, seemingly, but in reality the detective had been on the alert all the time.

The master of the "Nancy" was quite a different man in the morning when burning under the after effects of liquor than he was when in the full fever of a jolly spell. As he opened his eyes and saw our hero stretched upon the deck, he gave him a lunge in the ribs, and as Vance opened his eyes, Denman exclaimed:

"Hello! what are you snoozing there for, old man?"

The detective was on his feet in a moment.

"Who are you, and what are you doing here?"

Denman appeared to have forgotten who our hero was, but in reality he was only pretending to forget.

Denman was a good sailor, and a very cunning man; but at heart he was a very ugly and desperate fellow, and not at all distinguished by any of the generous traits usually characteristic of jolly tars.

"What's the matter, captain?"

"What's the matter? I'm asking you who you are, and what you are doing here?"

The detective came a little nearer, and assumed a surprised air.

"Don't stand there, making sober faces. Who are you, and what are you doing here?"

Denman was conscious that he was given to talking too much when in his cups, and he was leading the new hand on to betray just how much had been revealed to him.

"You shipped me last night, captain."

"I shipped you last night?"

"Yes; but if you don't want me as one of your crew, I'm willing."

"Who are you, anyhow?"

"My name is Ballard. I told you who I was last night."

"What did you tell me?"

"See here, captain, it ain't necessary to go over all what passed between us last night. If you don't want to take me on with you, say so, and I'll get ashore."

Denman laughed in a merry manner, and said:

"I reckon it's all right."

"I can prove it's all right, captain."

"How so?"

Ballard ran his eye over the yacht's rigging, and said:

"Would you take any suggestions from a man who had plenty of experience in crafts of this sort?"

"I would; yes."

The detective, who really was a splendid seaman, made some very pertinent and useful suggestions, and Denman was just sailor enough to appreciate that he had secured a useful man; and he said:

"It's all right. Consider yourself shipped. You're just the man I want; and we'll get to work at once on your alterations."

The suggestions were such as could easily be carried out by the master and his crew, and soon all hands were busy.

It had been decided that the yacht would go to sea that night, and our hero was booked for the trip.

Spencer Vance had played his cards well. He improved every moment in making himself popular with the crew, and late in the afternoon, when all hands went ashore, he was the hero of the gang. In an off-hand manner the detective remarked, as the boat was run on the beach:

"I'll see you later, boys; I'm going over for a bit to look after Tom Pearce."

CHAPTER XVI.

SPENCER VANCE had proceeded but a short distance, when he saw the figure of a girl coming across the sand, and his astonishment was great, when, upon a nearer approach, he recognized Renie.

The girl was neatly dressed, and her feet were covered with dainty slippers, while her hair was tastefully arranged.

Our hero had been impressed with the girl's rare beauty upon beholding her barefooted in her loose gown and unkempt hair; but, as he gazed upon her face when arrayed in neat and well-fitting attire, his admiration was increased.

Renie was indeed a rarely lovely girl—yes, upon those sands he had come upon one of the most beautiful girls he had ever beheld—classically beautiful; not pretty, but, as we write it, *rarely beautiful*, and she had been reared in a fisherman's cabin.

There was a certain suggestion in the girl's appearance before him in her best attire, that caused a glow of satisfaction around the detective's heart

There was nothing rich nor elegant in her apparel, but she was so exquisitely lovely her beauty could not be hidden by clothing, no matter how plain.

The girl greeted the detective in a frank, open manner, and appeared greatly pleased to meet him.

"I expected you to return to the cabin," she said.

"No; I spent the evening with the crew."

"You did not go in the yacht?"

"Yes, I did."

"Oh, why do you take such risks?"

"Never mind about the risks; how is your father?"

"He appears to be all right. He is up and around."

"What does he say about the assault?"

"He has said nothing since last night."

"Has he expressed any determination as to his course?"

"No."

"Well, you must be on your guard, and when I return from my trip, I will have a proposition to make."

"When you return from your trip?"

"Yes."

"Where are you going?"

"I am going off in the yacht."

"This must not be. No, no, you must not go off in the yacht, it will be certain death!"

"I have spent the night with the crew of the 'Nancy,' and they all think me a splendid fellow, and none of them has the least suspicion of my real identity."

"Was Sol Burton present?"

"No."

"Then you must not go on the yacht."

"What has the presence of Sol Burton to do with my going or staying?"

"I believe that man has penetrated your disguise."

"Impossible!"

"I saw him this morning."

"Well?"

"He asked me some strange questions. He was very curious concerning your identity."

A shadow fell over the detective's face.

"He spoke about me?"

"Yes."

"But he was speaking of the Government detective?"

"No; he was speaking of you as you have appeared among them in your present guise."

"Does he suspect my real identity?"

"I do not know, but he was very inquisitive concerning you."

"What did he say?"

"He lay in wait for me this morning, and when he got an opportunity he asked: 'Renie, who is that man the boys were going to hang last night?'"

"What answer did you make?"

"I answered: 'You know as well as I do;' when he exclaimed: 'You can't fool me, Renie, you have met that man before.'"

The detective was thoughtful a moment, but at length said:

"I reckon that fellow would be jealous of any one whom you might address."

"There was a deeper significance in his declaration, and as he went away he said: 'I hould not be surprised, Renie, if that fellow were to be hanged yet, before another sunrise!'"

"His talk is all buncombe, Renie, you need not attach any importance to anything he may say."

"But you will not go off in the yacht?"

"Yes: I shall go!"

A pallor overspread the girl's face, and a look of expressive sadness shone in her eyes as she murmured:

"It is my fate!"

"What do you mean, child?"

"I mean that you are a real friend; you are he of *whom I dreamed.*"

The detective glanced at the girl with an expression of aroused curiousness as he said:

"You dreamed of me?"

"Yes."

"This is very strange. What could have suggested such a dream?"

"I have dreamed all my life that some good friend would come some day and unravel the mystery of my parentage. It was accident that brought you and me together; but I had come to believe, although I have only known you for a few hours, that you were the good angel who would open the sealed book."

The detective advanced close to the girl, fixed his fine eyes upon her, and, while a bright flush reddened his cheek, he said, in an earnest tone:

"And so I will, Renie!"

"No, no; you have only come to raise a false hope."

"You are a strange girl, Renie."

"Yes, I am a strange girl in your eyes; but there is nothing strange about me. My surroundings make me appear so. Listen: I long for other scenes and associations; there is nothing that holds me to my present life. I know there is some one somewhere who longs for me as I yearn for her."

"Your mother?"

"Yes, my mother."

"If your mother be alive, it shall be my good office to bring mother and child together."

"Never."

"Why do you say never?"

"You are determined to go off on the yacht?"

"Yes, I shall go off on the yacht."

"We will never meet again."

"You take too gloomy a view of the situation."

"I know well the character of the crew of the 'Nancy.'"

"So do I."

A deeper pallor overspread the girl's face, as in a low, husky voice she whispered:

"I believe they are leading you on."

"Leading me on?"

"Yes."

"I do not understand."

"You say you are going off with them?"

"Yes."

"They would not take a stranger off with them unless *they had a purpose.*"

The girl had offered a most startling suggestion.

"The circumstances are peculiar, Renie, and I am a good seaman. I have already proved myself of service to them."

"That does not alter my idea."

"What is your idea?"

"I have a suspicion."

A moment's silence followed, when the detective asked:

"What do you suspect!"

"*They have recognized you!*"

CHAPTER XVII.

The few sharp quick words of the girl betrayed volumes. Her suggestion was indeed startling; and, what was more, there was not only a possibility, but a probability that her suspicion was correct.

A silence followed her words, but at length the detective said:

"I shall go off on the yacht, Renie."

"And you will never return!"

"Yes, I shall return."

"Suppose my suspicion is correct, and those men are leading you on?"

"It matters not, Renie, I shall go!"

"Are you madly seeking death?"

"No."

"If those men have recognized you, and are playing a part, there will be no chance for you the moment that yacht crosses the bar on her way out to sea."

The detective, on the impulse of the moment, was prompted to ask:

"Suppose they kill me, what will you do, Renie?"

The girl was silent until the detective repeated his question.

"I know what I shall do!"

"What will you do?"

"Roam the beach until all hope of the recovery of your body is passed, and then I shall lie down and die!"

She spoke in a weird, despairing tone.

"And you have known me but a few hours."

"Yes, I have known you to speak to you but a few hours, and yet I have come to believe that all the dreams of my life center in you."

The young man advanced and seized the girl's hand; the latter made no effort to withdraw it from his firm grasp.

"Renie," he said, "you need have no fear, I am not destined to die at the hands of the smugglers. I am assigned to a certain duty, the opportunity to fulfill my mission is now presented. I shall go on the yacht to-night, but when she returns I will return with her!"

"You are determined to go?"

"I am."

"I shall say no more, but I shall watch."

"Yes, Renie, do so; and when the yacht comes sailing up the bay, you may know that I come on her."

"I shall not watch for the return of the yacht," said the girl in a sad, despairing tone.

"What will you do?"

"Wait on the beach to see what the waves will bring me. If, when the deed is done, the tide be flowing in, I may gain something from the waves; but if the tide be on the ebb, I shall never gaze on your face again."

There was no mistaking the girl's weird meaning, and her words were practical, as she well knew the results which under certain circumstances might follow the tidal conditions.

Spencer Vance saw that it was useless to waste further words with Renie and he said:

"A few hours will tell the tale, Renie, and—"

The detective did not complete the sentence; voices were heard and Renie exclaimed:

"You and I must not be seen talking together; farewell, and if we never meet again on earth, may we meet where there are no clouds, no shadows, no mysteries."

The girl moved away and left the detective standing alone on the beach. The sun had gone down, the moon was just rising out of the sea, and the whole surrounding scene was impressive and one of solemn grandeur.

The detective stood motionless, and the ceaseless murmur of the waves as they broke upon the shore sounded like a requiem in his ears; but not once did he waver in his purpose. It might be that Renie would prove a true prophet, and if the tide served right those very waves, or rather their successors, might cast his body upon the shore; but despite all, he was determined to sail on the "Nancy" that night to win or die.

Two hours later there was quite a bustle on board the yacht, as she was being prepared to sail away.

The trip of the "Nancy" did not as a rule, exceed ten or fifteen hours, as she only ran twenty or thirty miles directly off the coast, where she cruised around waiting for the signal to flash across the water from some incoming vessel, said signal being an intimation as to the character of the craft.

Ike Denman, as commander of the "Nancy," was a different man from Ike Denman carousing with the crew ashore.

The "Nancy" was what nautical men would call a magnificent craft, and landsmen would naturally dub her a "daisy." She had been built as a sea-going boat, in the most substantial manner, and was indeed a stanch little mistress of the sea.

It was a beautiful evening as the mainsail was hoisted away and the gallant boat glided over the waters of the bay across the bar, and through the ruffled channel out to sea.

The detective had weighed well the words of the beautiful Renie, and was on the watch. Her suggestion was apt, and, as the detective thought over matters, he came to think that certain little indexes pointed toward a confirmation of her suspicions.

Indeed, it was an awful peril he was facing, were it really a fact that the men had "tumbled" to his identity, and were giving him a "blind," leading him, only waiting for the proper moment to cast off their masks and throw him into the sea.

There was one incident in his favor: the men were not at all reserved in the discussion of the business on hand. They talked over the purpose of the night, and opened up their expectations in the most unreserved manner.

The master of the craft, in his orders, made no distinction between our hero and the other members of the crew.

Meantime, the boat danced over the waves, and, after an hour or two, was cruising across the track of inward-bound vessels.

Soon there came the announcement of the lights of a vessel, and the "Nancy" was cautiously run on a course which would enable her captain to take observations.

The lights proved to be those of an ocean steamer, and the great leviathan, with its precious freight of human souls, plowed past the taut little yacht distant only half a mile.

When the lights were first seen, the detective was standing forward of the mainmast, and suddenly a pallor overspread his face. If it should prove that the lights were those of an incoming smuggler, the critical moment had arrived for him.

Our hero was intently watching the lights, as were the balance of the crew, waiting for a signal, and so absorbed was he as not to observe the presence of Sol Burton close by his side.

A few moments passed, and the lights were made out, and the word was passed around, "It's a steamer!"

The detective turned to go aft, when he found himself face to face with Sol Burton.

The two men had met as comrades once or twice before, during the two or three hours the boat had been out on the sea, but not a word had passed between them; but as they met after the distinguishing of the lights, Burton addressed our hero and said:

"You're the new man?"

"Yes," was the short answer.

"Your first trip on the 'Nancy'?"

"Yes."

There was a *premonition of danger* in the next words of Sol Burton.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"*I think I've seen you before, Ballard!*"

Sol Burton spoke in slow and very distinct tones, and his manner betrayed that there was a deep significance in his declaration.

"If you remember having seen me before, you have the advantage, my good friend."

"I think I've seen you before. I met you on board the 'Nancy.'"

"Where?"

"I can not recall, but there is something in your face that strikes me as very familiar."

The detective laughed in an easy manner, and answered:

"Well, you'll have to depend upon your own recollections, I can't aid you to a recognition."

As the detective spoke he remembered Renie's warning words, "Sol Burton, I fear, has his suspicions aroused."

"I noticed you turn pale when we first sighted the lights, Ballard."

"Did you?"

"I did."

Ballard stepped close to Sol Burton, and demanded in a determined tone:

"What are you getting at? I don't like this cross-questioning."

"That's my idea, Ballard. I don't think you like this cross-questioning, and I think further there is a good reason for you not liking it."

"If you've anything to say to me, spit it."

"When did you first show up on the coast?"

"Who are you? What's your name?" retorted Ballard.

"My name is Sol Burton."

"Ah, you are Burton; yes, I've *heard about you!*"

The detective used the words, "I've heard about you," in a very meaning tone.

"You've heard about me?"

"Yes, I've heard about you," came the response.

"What have you heard about me?"

"Oh, that's all right; your name is Sol Burton. Yes, yes, I've heard about you."

The declaration was reiterated in a tone of more aggravating significance.

"See here, Ballard, I want you to tell me what you mean."

"I've heard about you."

"What have you heard about me?"

"I's all right; I tell you I've heard about you. Yes, yes, your name is Burton; that's the man; I've heard about you."

Our readers can readily understand that the constant repetition of the declaration in a meaning tone was, under the circumstances, very aggravating, and Sol Burton lost his temper, his eyes flashed with anger, and his face became white, as he said:

"If you do not tell me what you mean, I'll knock you down!"

"I reckon you won't knock me down!"

"Will you tell me what you mean?"

"I'll tell you I've heard about you, and so I have; that is enough."

"See here, Ballard, it won't do for you to quarrel with me!"

"I don't care who I quarrel with!"

Burton advanced and whispered:

"I might come 'Quaker' on you, and give you a bad name."

"You can do just as you choose. I am not asking odds of you."

"I've my suspicions of you, Ballard."

Burton spoke in a hoarse whisper; the man was excited and trembling with rage and irritation.

It is possible a tragic *dénouement* might have followed the dialogue, had there not come just at that moment a startling interruption to the impending quarrel.

Again there came the signal cry: "Lights ahead!" and all hands ran eagerly to the rail to study the character of the distant craft.

All was silent watchfulness and expectancy as

the two boats approached nearer and nearer across the dark waters. Suddenly there shot up high into the air a rocket, and when far toward the clouds, a "bomb burst in air," and there followed a shower of many colored lights.

At once there was great excitement on board the "Nancy." Sol Burton had not stopped to finish his threatening talk with our hero, but all was bustle and excitement and work.

The boats were prepared for launching, and the ship's course was changed, and our hero knew that the long-expected smuggler had arrived.

Soon the two vessels approached each other; additional signals were exchanged, and the real purpose of the voyage was unfolded.

The smuggler kept upon her course, under close-reefed sails, but her crew was busy casting certain curious looking packages into the sea.

The boats from the "Nancy" were launched and manned, and were pulled away toward floating objects that had been cast upon the water.

Our hero was in one of the boats, and soon his crew came upon one of the floating objects and it was hauled into the boat.

One of the methods and mysteries was explained; the floating objects were large rubber and gutta-percha bags, water-tight and unsinkable, and in these waterproof sacks was packed the contraband merchandise.

Four boats were at work, and within a couple of hours no less than thirty-three of these sacks were put on board the "Nancy," containing thousands and thousands of dollars worth of goods that were never intended to pay duty to good old Uncle Sam.

All the bags were put on board, and the "Nancy" was ready to run into the bay and land her contraband cargo.

The detective expected she would run back on the course over which she had come out, but such was not the fact; on the contrary she lay to until all the goods were stowed below.

Spencer Vance had worked like a trooper, and for the time being, was the most active smuggler of them all, but later on he was brought face to face with his peril.

Our hero had finished all he had been called upon to do, and was standing leaning against the mast, when Ike Denman approached and said:

"Come aft, Ballard, I've a few words to exchange with you."

The detective obeyed with alacrity; coming to a halt near the cabin-way, Denman said:

"Ballard, you have proved yourself a good hand. I like you, but I've a statement to make; you can't share in the profits of to-night's work unless you become one of us."

"How's that, sir?"

"We are a regular organization; the crew of this boat is bound to secrecy by oaths and obligations, and I am about to give you the privilege of becoming one of us."

The detective realized his peril. He saw that the game had opened, that Renie's warnings were about to be fulfilled, but he was cool and easy and determined. It was a terrible moment, but he was as resolute as ever and replied:

"That wasn't in the programme, captain."

"What wasn't in the programme?"

"It wasn't stated that I was to take any oaths or obligations."

"I'll admit that, but it's necessary."

"You ought to have told me before I came with you on this trip."

"That is so, but I didn't; but you have come with us, you are here in our midst, you are posted as to our game, and now what are you going to do about it, Ballard?"

CHAPTER XIX.

"I AM not prepared to answer at present. I must have time to think," was the answer made by our hero.

"What do you want to think about?" demanded Denman.

"I wish to consider whether or not it will pay me to become a permanent member of your crew."

"You disappoint me, Ballard."

"How so?"

"I've given you a good chance, and I expected you would say all right at a jump. I've something to tell you: suspicions are aroused concerning you. I don't believe, myself, they are just, and I hope you will make good my conclusions."

"Suspicions concerning me?"

"Yes."

"Who suspects me?"

"One of the crew says you are a spy."

"Will you bring the man face to face with me?"

"What would you do?"

"When I meet my accuser I will tell you."

"You can save yourself the trouble."

"How?"

"By becoming one of us. I will deal fairly with you. Our obligations are as binding as blood and oaths can make them; but, once one of us, you will make heaps of money, and be companion to as jolly a set of men as ever took chances for a good livelihood."

"I must bind myself by oaths?"

"Yes; oaths as solemn as mortal lips ever uttered."

"I can't do it now."

"Why not?"

"I must have time to consider."

"Why do you need time to consider?"

"I've a reason."

"Will you name your reason?"

"Yes, I will, captain; you have been frank with me, I will be equally frank with you. I can't join your crew as long as one man is a member of it. I learn that I've an enemy on board. I never can take an obligation that would compel me to be friendly with that man!"

"Who is the man?"

"The villain who has accused me of being a Government spy!"

"How do you know which is the man?"

"I know."

"I am sorry, Ballard; I know I am to blame. I should have mentioned before what I am telling you, but there is no alternative now; you must join our crew in regular form."

"Never as long as one particular man is one of them."

"Mine is an unpleasant duty, Ballard; you have got all the points down on us, you must become one of us."

"What do you mean?" demanded the detective.

"The men demand that you join us."

"I will not."

"You will give me a chance for my life?"

"What chance do you want?"

"I wish to prove that my accuser is a liar."

"That would not help you, unless you became one of us; the fact that you have learned our methods settles the business, whether you are an informer or not. We run from here to the place where our goods are landed; you would have all the points down on us, and were you my own brother, it would be necessary for you to join us or be silenced. Now what will you do?"

"Give me half an hour to think the matter over."

"I've no right to give you any time."

"I can't run away, captain."

"I know, but I'd like to go back and make good my declaration in your favor. I'd like to tell the men it's all right, and that you will become one of us."

"On one condition I will take your oaths and obligations."

"What is your condition?"

"Let me settle my quarrel with the man who is my enemy."

"I never could consent to that; and besides, I must say that the fact of your suspecting a certain man as having informed against you, lends color to the charge. Ballard, you must join us or die."

Spencer Vance was still calm, and did not betray one particle of trepidation as he answered:

"I should have been informed of your requirements before I was permitted to ship with you."

"I made a mistake. I admit that I am responsible!"

"Are you willing to take the responsibility?"

"How can I?"

"Give me a chance for my life."

"How can I?"

"Make it a gauge of life or death between you and me."

Ike Denman laughed, and answered:

"Why, man, you are crazy!"

"Not crazy enough to pay the penalty of *your* mistakes with my life!"

There was a threat in the tones of the detective.

"What do you demand?"

"Your word of honor."

"To bind a promise?"

"Yes."

"What shall I promise?"

"That I shall meet my accuser face to face on this deck; let us decide it who is the spy and the traitor!"

"That wouldn't do, Ballard, and I am wasting time. Your chances are easy enough. All I ask is that you become one of us. Refuse, and I will be compelled to pass you over to the crew."

"And what will they do?"

"Try you."

"Try me for what?"

"Try you as a traitor."

"But I am no traitor."

"You are in our midst, and not one of us; that fact alone will be accepted as proof of your guilt."

"And I can escape by joining your crew?"

"Yes."

"I refuse."

"Have you considered well?"

"I am resolved not to join while my enemy is one of your number."

"You are throwing your life away."

"So be it, but *you go first!*"

Ike was taken all aback, but did not lose his head. He raised his hands toward his lips intending to sound a whistle, but he was restrained by Vance, who said:

"Move or make the least signal and you are a goner."

"Aha! the charge is true," said Denman in a low tone.

"You inveigled me on board this craft. You are in collusion with a man who wishes to get rid of me. There is no chance for me and *there is none for you!*"

"What do you mean by your statement that I am in collusion with your enemy?"

"I see it all. I was invited on this boat by you. Well, let it go so, but, Denman, you will not live to triumph over me. Nothing on land or sea can save you. I've got the bead on you dead!"

"What do you demand?"

"Your word that I shall stand face to face with my accuser."

"And then?"

"If he sticks to his charge, let him be my executioner."

"This is your demand?"

"Yes, this is my demand."

CHAPTER XX.

IT was a critical moment; both men were cool and spoke in deliberate tones.

They stood alone well toward the after-deck, while the men were all busy forward and below handling the contraband cargo.

The night was calm; the sea was unruffled; not a cloud intervened between sea and moon and stars, and yet two human lives hung in the balance—the lives of two brave men.

The detective was greatly disappointed. He had not accomplished all he desired. He had hoped not to be discovered until the schooner landed her cargo, and he had fallen upon the rendezvous and the mode of transport to the city. Still he had obtained a large amount of information, facts which he could work up; and could he only get ashore alive, he would be able to run down close on the real backers of the contraband business, who were a band of foreigners who only made their money by illicit traffic in New York, to spend it abroad.

The chances, however, for getting ashore were very slim. He had dared a little too much, and yet at that very moment the undaunted officer was playing a deep game.

Under a close reef the boat was heading in toward shore, and the detective was operating to gain time, as every ten minutes increased his chances of eventual escape.

After the detective's declaration, "Your own life will pay the forfeit!" there followed a moment's silence Vance would not break; time to him was precious while the yacht lay upon her inward course.

"You are a traitor, Ballard, you are a Government spy!"

"Who says so?"

"The charge has been made."

"Let me meet the man who makes the charge."

"And then?"

"I have made my demand. I am to receive your word that I shall have a fair chance to settle the matter with him."

"Your request is reasonable."

"It is."

"Why not join us and then make your demand?"

"I will never join a crew with that man; this is a trumped-up charge against me to satisfy private malice."

"Why does your accuser seek to accuse you falsely?"

"I am too much of a man to bring my private quarrel to public notice; captain, the matter stands here; you know I'm no tyro; as matters stand, I am doomed; against you and your crew out here at sea I've no chance for my life; but as the chances have turned, I can guarantee fair play ashore."

"You shall meet your accuser."

"And have a fair show?"

"Yes."

"I have your word, captain?"

"You have my word."

"Good enough, you have saved your life! I'll trust your word; if you go back on me, may the sharks soon crunch your living bones."

"You stand here, I'll bring the man aft."

"Good enough."

The captain went forward; the detective stood calm and patient, but his eyes were upon the master of the "Nancy." He saw Denman speak to the men, and then he saw the crew start in a body toward the after-deck. Denman had proved false, the smuggler had forfeited his word.

"It's now or never," muttered the detective, and he sprung beside the rudder-port and stood upon the stern rail. His form towered up through the night like an apparition, as he called in a loud tone:

"You and I will meet again, Denman. Sol Burton is a liar."

Head first the intrepid detective dove from the vessel down into the water, and when he came to the surface he was beyond range, as the yacht was moving along with moderate speed in one direction, while our hero was swimming under water in an opposite course.

"Lower away the boat!" shouted Sol Burton.

The men ran to obey, but at that moment lights were seen, and one of the men shouted:

"It's a cutter!"

Ike Denman heard the latter shout, and commanded:

"Hold fast there the boats!"

The crew had not time to take up a boat when the cutter was bearing down upon them.

"That man can never get ashore," said an old tar; "no living man in full toggery can go over the side of this boat and ever come unaided out of the sea!"

"The cutter may pick him up," suggested Sol Burton.

"More likely to pick us up! No, no, he'll be down on the bottom before the cutter gets around, and she will not run within five miles of where he went over, if she heads her course to overhaul us."

"It's not a cutter," said Sol Burton.

"Well, let it go so; that man Ballard is with the angels by this time," came the response.

Meantime the detective was moving like a fish through the calm waters toward the shore.

It was a smooth sea, and only a fifteen-mile swim, and he had gone aboard the yacht prepared for the venture.

When Spencer Vance sprung overboard, he was oiled from his ears to his heels, and his clothing was ready to be peeled down to an oil-skin under-suit, lined in the inner side with soft wool.

Like a fish he cut through the waters, and his heart was as brave as his sweeping stroke, as he propelled himself forward toward the shore.

"It's all right, Johnny," he muttered, as he spurted some sea water from between his lips. "I'll keep my word. I'll interview Ike Denman when he is not looking for me; and, as to Sol Burton, I'll catch that man some day!"

The detective swam along merrily, and, in less than four hours after having leaped from the yacht, he crawled upon the beach, and lay down in the warm sand to rest, burying himself like a mole; and there he lay for over an hour, when he rose to his feet, and started to walk down the coast. He was not sure of the distance he would be compelled to travel, but was assured as to the direction he was to take.

Our hero was quite proud of his achievement, but felt a little blue when he observed a storm coming in rapidly from the sea; but his luck did not desert him. He saw a deserted cabin, toward which he made his way, and it did not take him long to gather a lot of twigs and drift, and, upon reaching the cabin, he made a fire, and sat down before the cheerful blaze, as comfortable an individual as ever took a long chance in the way of duty.

Once in the cabin, the brave man betrayed the ingenuity of his preparations for his perilous venture, and verified his confident statement to Renie, that she need have no fear, as in good time he would come ashore again to tell the tale of his adventure.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE detective had a thin rubber belt stretched under his arms; the latter served as a buoy and as a receptacle for the necessary articles which he knew he would require when he reached shore.

Within the belt he had found matches, and weapons, and clothing, the latter of thin material wound as tightly as cotton on a spool; and, as stated, as the fire burned and blazed and crackled, he felt quite comfortable; and, as the storm broke over his cabin, a warm glow of satisfaction circulated through his frame.

"This is just jolly!" he muttered, as he eat away at a good sandwich, and, later on, from his treasure belt he drew forth pipe and tobacco and settled down for a smoke.

The whole face of the sea, meantime, had changed; a fierce storm had arisen; the wind howled and the rain beat down against his refuge, and the noise of the storm but sent a warmer glow to his heart.

Our hero realized that he had reached shore just in time. The tempest had held back for him, as it were, as, had it come upon him while in the sea, no power on earth could have saved him.

Ensconced in his deserted cabin, with a glowing fire, his pipe, and a wee drop of whisky, the roar of the tempest was music in his ears, and lulled him to a peaceful slumber from which he was rudely aroused, later on, by a punch in the ribs. The detective awoke, leaped to his feet, and confronted a powerful-looking man in an oil-skin suit.

"Hello! who are you, and what are you doing here?" came the inquiry from the stranger.

"Those are just the questions I'm putting to you," answered our hero.

"Well, stranger, my questions are first, I reckon."

"You're right; but tell me, am I in your quarters?"

"No, not exactly; this shanty was built for common use; but where did you come from?"

"I came from the sea."

"You're a man, you're not a fish; how did you come in from the sea?"

"I swam in."

"Has there been a wreck?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Well, you're talking riddles; suppose you get down to plain United States lingo."

"I fell overboard and was compelled to swim or sink."

"What sort of a craft did you come over from?"

"A yacht."

"A pleasure yacht?"

"Well, yes."

"And you weren't picked up?"

"If I had been I wouldn't be here."

"That's so. How far were you off shore?"

"Not *very* far."

"You must have gone over before the storm set in."

"I should say so; and now as I've answered your questions, who are you?"

"I am a fisherman. I ran into the cove on account of the storm, and came over here to stay until daylight, or later if the storm holds."

"I reckon the storm won't hold much longer; it's only a passing tempest, and so make yourself comfortable. Will you have a bite?"

"Thank you, I had food with me in my boat."

"Will you cover a little whisky."

"*I will!*" came the hearty acceptance.

The two men had a long, pleasant talk, and our hero soon learned that his new accquaintance was a really honest fisherman—a good, square man; and there are many of them on the Long Island coast, and no truer and better men can be found in any quarter of the globe.

When fully satisfied that the man was an honest fellow, our hero opened up a certain subject with him.

"Taylor, did you run across a gang of smugglers in your experience along the coast?"

"You can just bet I have run across them; and, between you and me, it is an easy matter to put my hand on the key that locks the door of their secret warehouse."

"You can do that?"

"I can."

"How is it you have never communicated with the Government?"

"Well, I'll tell you. I've always been afraid it might get me into some sort of a scrape. You see, I am a man of family, and couldn't afford to lose any time."

"I'll let you into a secret,"

"All right."

"I'm a Government officer."

"Whew! is that so? Well, I might have suspected as much. And so you did not come in from the sea, but you're lying around here expecting to discover something? You're on the wrong part of the coast, however; this is not the spot for you to lay. I can give you a better point."

"That's just what I'm looking for."

"I don't know, however; I might get myself into trouble."

"No fear of that; you need only act as a guide to me."

"Well, I'll think it over."

The detective began to grow a little suspicious of his new friend; there was a possibility that he had concluded as to the fisherman's honesty a little too soon.

"There is no need for you to consider, as a good citizen you owe it as a duty to the Government."

"That's so, but I owe more to my family; some of the gang are neighbors of mine, and if it were ever known that I betrayed their hiding-place, it would go hard with me."

"No one will ever know that you betrayed them; we will go secretly to their rendezvous; you will point out the spot to me, and I will manage the rest, and you will be well paid for your service."

"And you are a Government officer?"

"I am."

"Tell me the true story of your being here."

"I can not tell you more than I have already revealed."

"I am to be paid if I point out the rendezvous?"

"Yes, well paid!"

"And I am only to locate the place?"

"That is all."

"I will do it."

"When?"

"At once, or as soon as the tempest ceases."

"The storm is most over now."

"I will sail in my boat to the nearest point, we will have to go the balance of the way overland."

"That is all right."

"But remember, no attempt at seizure must be made within twenty hours after I have located the warehouse!"

"That is all right; and now tell me, do you know any of the principals?"

"How do you mean?"

"I will tell you; no harm will come to the actual smugglers, beyond the breaking up of their business; it's the men who furnish the capital that I am after."

"I can put you on the track of one or two of them."

"Do so, and you will make a small fortune."

"But I will become a regular informer."

"Did you ever belong to one of the gangs?"

"Never."

"Then it makes no difference to you, as you will never be known in the matter. How far is your boat from here?"

"Five minutes' walk."

"When shall we start?"

"It will soon be daylight; we had better wait until dawn."

"All right, and we will improve the hour or two we have remaining of darkness by a refreshing sleep."

CHAPTER XXII.

One adventure had led forward to another, and again to another, until the detective was well on his road toward a point where he could make a "closing in" attack.

He knew it would be a grand thing for him to run the gang clear down to their bottom methods.

The detective had been keeping tireless vigils, and sleep was what he most needed, and two good hours of undisturbed sleep was as much to him as seven or eight to an ordinary person.

He was aroused by Taylor, and upon awaking and looking out, he saw that it was broad daylight, and indeed a bright and beautiful morning.

Taylor had been up some time; he had been to his boat, and had brought back the necessary articles for a good breakfast, and our hero was summoned to as solid a morning meal as he had ever enjoyed.

After breakfast the two men went to where Taylor's boat lay, a large and stanch little mainsail and jib boat, rough in appearance, but a good sea boat and a fast sailer.

The captain of the little craft steered her through the channel, and was soon running across the famous Great South Bay, and later on our hero found himself in one of those many famous Long Island sea-coast towns, where summer boarders make merry the passing hours of the July and August months.

Taylor took our hero to his own home, and introduced him to a cleanly and interesting family.

"When do we start?" demanded Vance, after indulging in a good, and really substantial dinner.

"We will take the two o'clock train," was the reply.

Our readers will observe that we do not name localities, and we have a good reason. Within the last few months smuggling has been resumed, and the government is adopting measures once more to suppress the traffic, and we have decided that the interest of our narrative does not demand more specific details.

To those of our readers who are acquainted with the Long Island coast, it is not necessary to name the several localities; as, from passing hints, they will be able to locate the several points; and readers who live afar would be no wiser were we to name towns, and designate exact localities.

It was late in the afternoon when our hero and his friend, Taylor, stood on the shore of another one of the several famous bays that indent Long Island's sea-girt shore; and, what was still more startling, about half a mile off shore lay the yacht "Nancy."

Our hero and his companion were at the point when the taut little smuggler ran down from the inlet, and came to an anchor off the shore.

At the time the place had not become as great a resort as at present, and the hordes of pleasure-seekers, who now, during certain seasons of the year dwell on the coast, little dream of the wild scenes, and wilder orgies that occurred thereabouts a few years back.

Taylor and the detective had crossed the bay to the island and were hidden in the brush that fringed the bluff overlooking the shore, when the "Nancy" ran down as described and came to an anchor.

"There's the smuggler!" exclaimed Taylor as he first caught sight of the yacht.

"Yes, there's the 'Nancy' as sure as you are born," returned the detective.

"Ah, you know her?"

"I reckon I do."

"There's a bad lot on that boat."

"There is a bad lot; they are a crew of murderers and bandits."

"They do great harm to our legitimate business, and good honest men are constantly annoyed by the cutters who hail and search them almost daily."

"We will soon put that crew out of harm's way," remarked the detective.

"She's loaded," said Taylor.

"How loaded?"

"She's got a contraband cargo beneath her decks."

"How do you know?"

"She never runs in here only when she comes to put her goods ashore."

"Don't the people over on the mainland know of her business?"

"Well, a few may suspect, but I don't believe they know; you see she will put in a load of produce, take a regular cargo from here, and the most of the people think she's an honest coaster. I've known her to get freight from a regular shipping company in New York, and deliver an assorted cargo, simply as a blind."

"How is it you chanced to run her down to her real business, and get all the points so dead on the crew?"

"My first discovery was accidental, and since then I just investigated a little for my own satisfaction."

"How long has she been engaged in this traffic?"

"About two years; previous to that the business was broken up and nothing was done for a long time; but about two years ago, the 'Nancy' was manned and put under the charge of Denman, who is an old smuggler, and I believe that man could be worth thousands upon thousands, but they say he goes to New York and gambles and sports all his money away; but he must handle a good pile in the course of a year."

"I see his crew is made up of all nationalities?"

"Yes; but they are mostly West Indians, not natives, but fellows raised down among the Islands."

"When will she run her cargo ashore?"

"To-night, and she will do it so quickly that you'd hardly know her crew had been at work."

"It's a wonder they have never been discovered."

"I reckon they have been, but Denman practices the old Captain Kidd maxim: 'Dead men tell no tales.'"

"Has he dared to kill anybody?"

"Well, men have been missing around here, and later on, they have been found floating in the bay, and the people have always concluded they were cases of drowning while drunk; and I always thought so myself, until about two months ago, when I fell to a suspicion."

"Did you never tell your suspicion?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I was waiting a chance to verify it."

"You think it would cost a man his life to be caught by those fellows?"

"That's my idea."

The detective had made some important discoveries, and, among others, he had "piped" down to the fact that the crew of the "Nancy" were as desperate and blood-thirsty a set of scoundrels as ever ran in and out of Long Island even with that famous buccaneer, Captain Kidd.

"About how many men have been missing at different times?" asked our hero.

"It's hard to tell: but the crew of the 'Nancy' could tell some fearful tales if they were to open their mouths."

The detective was destined to go to the bottom of the mystery.

The place selected by the men for their work was one of the most lonely and desolate on the whole coast at that time.

Taylor informed our hero that they would not unload from where they were anchored; he said:

"They will run down around the point yonder, put their cargo ashore, and then sail back and reanchor where you see them now. I tell you they make quick work of it."

"But I can not see how they escape detection."

"Oh, they have plenty of confederates; the gang is not composed alone of the men who sail in the 'Nancy.'"

"Then we must lay low until night falls?"

"Yes."

The detective encountered some thrilling adventures ere another sunrise.

CHAPTER XXIII.

The detective's friend, Taylor, appeared disinclined to remain; he said:

"I only promised to point out to you the rendezvous."

"Have you done so?"

"Yes."

"I do not know where the landing is made."

"Off yonder point."

"Around in the cove?"

"Yes."

"You can remain with me?"

"No, I can not."

"Why not?"

"Well, this is no place for strangers; we are in peril every moment we stay here."

"We are all right, so long as the crew of the 'Nancy' remain on their boat."

"Not to-night; we are not safe."

"Why not?"

"Because the 'Nancy' is there. Why, sir, we do not know at what moment some one may spring upon us! All their spies are out and on guard to-night; everything is watched as a cat watches a mouse-hole!"

"If you leave me, how am I to get over to the mainland?"

Taylor did not make an immediate reply, and the detective repeated his question.

"I did not think you intended remaining."

"What did you think?"

"I thought you would mark down the bearings and come here in force."

"But, as I've an opportunity to get the whole business down fine, I propose to remain."

"Then you will need a boat."

"Yes, I will, surely, in the morning."

"No, sir."

"What are you getting at?"

"I will speak plainly. If you remain here, you will never see the mainland again. I tell you those men are a desperate lot!"

"But they will not find me."

"The chances are ten to one against you, and that they will find you. I would not remain here to-night for a hundred thousand dollars! The danger begins exactly at nightfall."

"You have got it down as fine as that, eh?"

"I have."

"If you take away the boat, you will take from me what chance I might have for escape."

"You must not remain."

"But I shall!"

"You are determined?"

"I am."

"Very well, I will leave you the boat; by walking about four miles I can find a way to cross over to the mainland."

"I wish you were a braver man."

"I have a family."

"That settles it!" exclaimed the detective, and he added, "as you are going away you had better go now."

It was near sundown, and there lay the "Nancy" on the calm waters of the bay, looking to be as harmless a craft as rested on a keel.

"Can I not persuade you to go with me?"

"No, sir."

"You can not fully realize the danger."

"Hang the danger! I've a duty to perform, and I'll stay here and see that cargo put ashore from the 'Nancy,' even if it prove the last scene of my life!"

"The chances are that such will prove to be the fact; I warn you that the danger can not be denied."

"Well, you had better go if you have four miles to travel before sundown."

"Have you any messages to leave?"

"None."

"Who am I to report to in case you are never seen alive?"

"You are taking a serious view of it."

"I am; I tell you it's certain death for a stranger to remain on this island to-night!"

"Suppose the stranger is not discovered, my good friend?"

"You are certain to be discovered. The whole island will be patroled."

"You speak like a man who has had some dire experience."

"I would not remain on this island to-night for the full value of it in dollars."

"Why do you specify to-night?"

"Oh, any other night it would be all right, but as you know, it is a business evening to-night, and they will be all on guard."

"I must take the chances."

"Well, good-bye; I go now."

"Good-bye; I will call and see you to-morrow and pay you your reward."

"I hope you may, but I never expect to see you again. What I recommend is that you guide the cutter to this place."

"I must first know just where to guide them."

"Come here in force, and with all the knowledge you have you will soon find the right place."

"I will come here in force in good season, but to-night I take points alone."

"Good-bye."

"All right, good-bye."

Taylor spoke in a very solemn tone, and wore a solemn look upon his face as he walked away.

The sun was just on the edge of the horizon when our hero found himself alone

"Well, well," he muttered, "I have been a lucky man. I've got this business right down to the right point, and with the additional information I shall gain I will be king of the mystery."

The detective was highly delighted with his prospective success, and with wonderful patience under all the circumstances, he awaited the approach of night.

From his position on the bluff, he commanded a full view of the smuggler yacht, and it was with a sweet unction to his soul that he remembered his words to Denman and his crew: "I shall see you again!"

He felt that he would come upon the smugglers at the proper moment, like an apparition fresh from a new-made grave. The men he knew believed him dead, and he well remembered the proverbial superstition of sailors, and it struck him that the time might come when it would stand him in hand to take advantage of the startling shock that would certainly attend his reappearance before that murderous crew.

Night fell, and the detective strained his eyes to watch the movements on board the "Nancy."

The men, as he discovered, were playing their game well; at the proper hour their lights were set, and all the necessary precautions taken for a vessel which proposed to lay at anchor all night in a water way.

The detective was still on the watch, while the hours slowly glided away until near midnight, when he saw certain movements on board the boat that warned him she was about to change her position.

The detective, who had been lying on the grass, rose to his feet, prepared to follow the movements of the "Nancy," when he was suddenly confronted by an armed man.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE detective was momentarily taken all aback. The stranger came upon him suddenly.

One fact was established: the man had been the first to make the discovery of the presence of the detective, and his good luck gave him, seemingly, the advantage.

For a moment the two men stood gazing at each other under the starlight.

The silence was broken by the armed man, who said:

"Well, mister, what are you doing spying around here?"

"Who says I'm spying around here?"

"I do."

"Well, you and I won't quarrel."

quarrel."

The stranger had a dead bead on the detective.

"No, stranger, you and I won't quarrel, it's easy for us to come to an understanding; just tell me who you are, and what you're doing around here, or say your prayers as quick as you can."

"Why, what do you mean, my good man?—this ain't one of the South Sea Islands! I haven't fallen in with cannibals right here in Suffolk County, New York State!"

The detective was coming the innocent dodge, and his little lead off was most excellent, and displayed great quickness and readiness of thought.

The smuggler, as later on the stranger proved to be, was set a little back by the detective's pretended innocence, but in a moment he recovered his ideas, and said:

"I think you're a thief!"

"You think I'm a thief!"

"Yes, I do."

"Well, this is a great idea, that I should be taken for a thief!"

"You don't live on the island?"

"No."

"Have you any friends here?"

"No."

"That's just what I thought. And now, give an account of yourself—what are you doing prowling around here?"

"This is a free country; a man can go where he pleases, I reckon, without giving an account of himself to every man he meets."

"If you've got any friends on the island who know you and will vouch for you, it's all right; otherwise you will give an account of yourself."

"I reckon it's none of your business what I am doing on the island. I think you had better give an account of yourself, coming upon a stranger, after dark, with pistols in your hands!"

"I can give an account of myself. I am one of a citizens' committee. Robberies have been frequent on this island of late, and we compel every stranger to give an account of himself."

"Oh, that's it, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, arrest me, and I will give an account of myself to the proper authorities."

"I am the proper authority."

"I don't recognize your authority."

"You are my prisoner!"

"That's all right," said the detective; and, throwing up his arms, he walked toward the armed man.

The latter did not know exactly how to act under the circumstances, the detective was so cool and acted so strangely.

Our hero, however, knew what he was up to well enough, and, when within a few feet of the smuggler, he suddenly threw himself forward and grappled with the ruffian.

A struggle followed. Both were powerful men, but the detective was the most active and the coolest, and better prepared to take advantage of all chances.

Exerting himself to almost superhuman efforts, he forced the ruffian back to a great bowlder, and threw him down with such force that the man lost consciousness.

Half an hour passed.

The man lay silent and motionless like one dead, and no one came to the rescue.

The detective moved stealthily from his hiding-place to the verge of the bluff and glanced over to the spot where the "Nancy" had been riding at anchor. The boat had disappeared.

A moment Vance stood and considered. He knew that he was walking upon dangerous ground. He had received an intimation of the desperateness of the gang. After a review of the situation he walked back to where the smuggler whom he had worsted lay. The man was just beginning to show signs of returning consciousness.

"I reckon I'll render you harmless for the balance of the night," muttered the detective, and he bound the man hand and foot.

The man meantime revived, and called for water.

"Ah, you are thirsty, are you?" muttered the detective, who, after all, was a humane and merciful fellow, and he proceeded to a running rill near by and got some water in a rubber cup which he always carried about him.

The man slaked his thirst, and asked:

"Where am I?"

"You are at home, I reckon."

The smuggler, at length, appeared to realize that he had been bound, and he said:

"Who tied me up this way?"

"I did."

"Why?"

"You were set to shoot me down, and I got the better of you."

"Ah, I remember."

"Yes, you set on me and I was compelled to serve you out."

"Release me now, it's all right."

"Oh, it's all right, eh? well, I don't think so; it's my idea you are a bad character, and I'm going to keep you here until I notify the constable or some one else. I think you are a highwayman or a robber or something of that sort; you're a bad man anyhow."

"Release me, I live upon the island. I am well known. I am no burglar or robber. I took you for one."

"Did you? well you were mistaken, and now, Mister Man, what have you got to say particular before you go to sleep?"

"Before I go to sleep! what do you mean?"

"I mean you will rest here until morning, until I can notify some of the citizens here, so they can come and take you into custody; it's my idea you are a bad character."

"You do not mean what you say; you will not leave me here?"

"I will."

"It will cost you your life."

"Will it?"

"I will follow you to the end of the world."

"That's all right, but you won't start out on your journey until after to-morrow, my friend."

"You certainly do not mean to leave me here tied in this manner?"

"Yes, I do, and I'm going to insert this in your jaw, so you will rest *quiet* until morning."

"Hold! release me and I will forgive you."

The detective's answer was the insertion of a gag in the man's mouth, and at the same instant footsteps were heard.

CHAPTER XXV.

SPENCER VANCE sprung to his feet, and stood and listened, determined to have the drop on the other man in case of danger, and not again get caught in the position he was when the first smuggler called him to account.

The intruder passed on his way without having come upon our hero and his gagged prisoner.

The detective stole after the man, but concluded he was merely a resident of the island who passed by through chance.

Returning to his man Vance made sure that he could not release himself, and then started down to the shore and moved along the beach, hoping to come upon the smugglers engaged in the unloading of their goods.

The detective traversed about four miles of coast when, far ahead of him, he saw the glimmer of dancing lights.

"Aha!" he muttered, "I've got 'em!"

He spoke in an incautiously loud tone, when a man sprung toward him.

The smugglers had put out sentinels, and our hero had run across one of them.

The sentinel proved to be a resolute fellow, as he did not stop to ask questions, but made a stroke at the detective's head.

Our hero dodged the blow, and seized the fellow. The man struggled violently, and made several attempts to sing out an alarm, but he was in a grip of iron. The detective, however, had no time to spare. He was an overmatch for the smuggler, but at any moment assistance might arrive. It was silence the officer needed at that moment, and he buried the fellow's head under water.

The poor fellow struggled violently, and it appeared a cruel recourse, but our hero knew that the water would render the man temporarily harmless. He did not mean to drown him.

The man's struggles finally ceased, when the detective raised his head from the water.

The fellow was not dead, but his cries were stopped for the time being—a water gag, as our hero termed it.

Vance left the man lying on the beach, and advanced more cautiously. He had crossed the line and was in the charmed circle.

Like an Indian on a trail he crawled forward, and, regardless of peril, approached quite close to the working party.

Just above the water-line was a wall of rock, and built upon the rock was a small house, and into this house the goods were carried.

The detective saw that the house was not of sufficient dimensions to hold all the goods that were carried in, and he made up his mind at the proper time to make a survey of the place and delve to the secret.

Nothing more was to be done that night. He had ascertained all he desired. He had located the rendezvous and the store-house; while on the yacht he had marked some of the goods, so that he could identify them. He had trailed down the methods, noted the active workers, and all that remained was for him to get safely off the island and trace down to the backers.

He had taken long chances, but all his risks were amply repaid by his wonderful success.

The detective, at the moment he decided to get away, was so close to the working party that he could overhear what passed between them and while he watched he saw a figure glide into their midst.

"The dead alive!" was the under-toned exclamation that fell from his lips as he recognized the half-drowned man whom he had so successfully overcome.

At once there followed great excitement. A consultation was summoned. The man had evidently told his startling tale.

Our hero recognized Ike Denman, the traitor and falsifier, captain of the "Nancy," and he heard Ike say:

"You are sure it was not one of the islanders?"

"I am sure. I tell you I recognized the man!"

"You recognized him?"

"Yes."

"Who was he?"

"*Ballard!*"

A murmur of incredulousness rose from the men, and Ike Denman exclaimed:

"You have been fooled by your fancy; you have been dreaming!"

"No; I wasn't dreaming; I swear I saw Ballard, the man who went overboard from the 'Nancy' twenty miles out at sea."

"I tell you, man, you have been dreaming."

The man pointed down to his wet clothes.

"Yes, you scoundrel, you fell asleep and rolled down the bank into the water, and you saw a ghost in your dream."

"You fellows may think I saw a ghost, but I can prove I didn't. Yes, sir, prove it."

"How?"

"Bring your lanterns and come with me."

"What will you show us?"

"The man's tracks in the sand at the spot where he and I had the wrestle."

The man started for the point where our hero had first met the smuggler; had the former been less brave and reckless he would have seized the opportunity to get away, but he was curious to witness the result of the inquiry, and he moved along to the spot where the combat had taken place, and took up a position on the bluff near enough to see and overhear.

The men with their lanterns reached the place and an examination followed.

The imprints of two pairs of feet were plainly visible. Denman made close examination, even measuring the different foot-prints; when he had concluded he said in a hoarse voice:

"Boys, we've been followed; there's an enemy on the island, and he must never get away alive!"

By the glare of the lanterns our hero could see the men's faces, and they were pale and contorted with excitement and trepidation.

"I reckon I'll go now," he said, "it's getting rather warm around here."

The officer quietly moved away, while Denman divided his men into several squads and started them on a hunt for the spy.

The master of the "Nancy" was completely mystified. He could not understand how it was possible, under even the most extraordinary circumstances, that Ballard could be alive and upon the island. He supposed, as a matter of course, the detective was dead, and yet his man had positively sworn as to the revenue officer's identity.

"This is the most wonderful thing in all my experience!" declared the master of the "Nancy," as alone he walked back toward the landing-place of the boats.

Meantime the detective had reached a most extraordinary determination. He saw that the chances were against him if he sought to reach the boat in which he and Taylor had crossed from the mainland; and yet is was absolutely necessary that he should have a boat. He reasoned that the smugglers would scatter all over the island, and concluded that the safest place for him was the starting-point of the searchers.

It required a cool, level-headed man to decide under all the circumstances, and our hero was just the sort of man described.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE detective made sure that the men had scattered, and that the search was in full blast, when he doubled on his course and moved down toward the warehouse. Here again he displayed his reckless courage. He approached the small building on the bluff, from the rear, and entered it, and one mystery was explained—the building was but the cover to the entrance to an immense underground warehouse.

A lantern was hanging near by, and the detective seized it and descending the stairs entered a great store-house.

A sight met his gaze which filled him with amazement. His fortune was made at last; the store-house was filled with packages of valuable goods; indeed, an immense fortune lay scattered about.

Later on the detective came to learn more particularly the methods of the smugglers, but for the present as he stood there he realized that he was a wondrously lucky man, unless he should prove unlucky enough to be captured.

While standing in the subterranean store-house an idea entered his mind and he exclaimed:

"By George, that's just the scheme."

He returned to the upper room and replaced the lantern, and immediately redescended to the store-house.

The detective had a masked lantern with him, having secured it while abiding a few hours at the home of his guide, Taylor.

Spencer Vance had determined to hide himself in the smugglers' underground warehouse. He had reached the conclusion that he could find no safer place.

Spencer Vance had struck a big scheme. Even while in such great peril, and while busy, he was revolving in his mind all the chances and contingencies; but over all loomed the possibility of discovery. There was no friendly sea to receive him should those men find him secreted in their treasure den.

The detective was like a man walking in a suspected coal mine with a lighted torch, who at any moment might strike a chamber filled with the fatal gas, which, coming in contact with the light, would have blown man and mine to smithereens.

Meantime the search continued on the island, and the detective was rejoiced as he saw that, after all, the discovery of his presence was a most excellent thing, as it would lead to the eventual discovery of the real smugglers, through means which will be described later on.

Vance had measured every step as he progressed, and knew just where he would fetch out, provided he once got away from the island; but there, as stated, loomed the chance against him. His opportunity would depend largely upon the decision of Ike Denman after the return of his searching parties.

One of the searching parties was moving along looking for a trail, when a cry from one of their number brought the squad together. The man had stumbled upon the strapped and gagged smuggler.

There was a circus for a few moments after the discovery, and there followed some loud swearing, not low, but deep, fast and furious.

The man had been gagged so long it was some minutes before he could relate his sad tale.

One of the men said to him:

"Who served you out, Jim?"

When the man found voice he answered:

"The devil or one of his imps."

"Hello! did you see the ghost?"

"What ghost?"

"The ghost of Ballard."

"I don't know anything about the ghost of Ballard, but I had a rough scrimmage with the gamest man I ever tackled."

"Didn't you recognize him?"

"No."

"I wonder if there are two of 'em on the island?"

"What's happened, boys?"

"Well, it's looking as though the devil himself were loose to-night."

The man proceeded and told how another of their crew had met the island mystery, and had been half drowned by him.

"I tell you," said the man, "it's going to stand us in hand to get that fellow on; the game is all dead against us, and we'll whistle for our share of prize-money."

"Come along with us and we may find our man; you can identify him?"

"Identify the devil! let me see him just one second."

The men, as a fact, failed to discover the island mystery, and different parties returned and reported to Ike Denman.

When the master of the "Nancy" heard of the laying out of another of his sentinels, his rage knew no bounds, and calling his men around him he declared:

"We must find out this fellow. He can not have left the island!"

One of the men suggested:

"We may never get a sight of him."

"If it is Ballard we can recognize him."

The men were sent away once more, and many of their passive confederates on the island were aroused and started out on the search; indeed the island became alive with secretly armed men.

Ike Denman was satisfied that the detective had not got away, and he was determined to find him. Hundreds of thousands of dollars were at stake; the fact that the detective had trailed down to their rendezvous meant ruin.

The master of the "Nancy" did not for one moment believe in his own mind that the mystery was Ballard; his common sense suggested that it was impossible that the fellow could have escaped, unless by some strange fatality he had been picked up, and as there were no vessels near enough to see him at the time he went over from the yacht, the latter chance did not seem probable.

It was well toward morning when several of the crew, according to orders, returned and joined the captain, and the latter went aboard the "Nancy" and sailed her back to where she had been previously anchored.

One man was left in charge of the yacht, and the balance, with the captain, rowed ashore and proceeded afoot to the rendezvous, and at length daylight came.

The search had proved a failure, and when it was well on in the morning all hands were assembled at the rendezvous.

A majority of the men were sent aboard the "Nancy," while the master and some of his most reliable confederates remained ashore.

The men had made a thorough search, and all hands were still of the opinion that the detective, or whoever it was that had been tracking them, still remained secreted somewhere on the island.

One of the men, a shrewd fellow, offered several singular suggestions. He had accurately measured the tracks of the man who had laid out two members of the crew, and he had found duplicate foot imprints down around the rendezvous.

A more dazed and bewildered set of men were never engaged in an illegal traffic.

Meantime the daring detective was lying low right in their very midst.

CHAPTER XXVII.

SPENCER VANCE had not been idle while in the subterranean warehouse; but, with his masked lantern, he had gone about, and, in a regular business-like manner, had made an inventory of the merchandise scattered about; and he had also copied all the shipping-marks and also all the hieroglyphic brush signs. He furthermore opened some of the cases, and put identification marks on some of the goods—indeed, he did his work in a thorough and masterly manner. He had accomplished wonders; but he was not yet safely off the island.

Later on the detective made some startling and ghastly discoveries. He came upon a box containing human bones, and he was sufficiently experienced to recognize that, in the case of the remains, ordinary decay had been supplemented by artificial processes, and the latter discovery was a *prima facie* testimony in favor of the theory that the bones were those of murdered victims.

Our hero was still rummaging around when his attention was attracted by human voices, and, closing the slide of his lantern, he laid low and watched, and, a moment later, became aware that some of the crew of the "Nancy" were in the warehouse.

"I wonder," he muttered, "if they have come to look for me here? If they have, I reckon I'm in a tight place!"

The detective crawled toward the place where the smugglers were gathered, and he overheard their conversation.

One of them remarked.

"It's all nonsense to look for him in here."

"If it is Ballard, or Spencer Vance, I'd look for him in my vest pocket; either one of those men would dare to go anywhere."

"Well, search," commanded Ike Denman.

"Now I am a goner," was the mental declaration of the intrepid revenue officer, while at the same time he was resolved to take all necessary precautions. He found a hiding place and passed a full hour of anxiety, indeed, a mental strain that would have turned a less nervy man gray.

The agony, however, passed, and he escaped discovery, and heard one of the fellows say:

"He is not in here, that is certain."

"You're mistaken, Charley," muttered the detective to himself, in a spirit of reckless facetiousness.

Ike Denman appeared to be completely disheartened, and he said:

"I tell you, my good fellows, we're in trouble; that man has got away."

"What will you do?"

"There is only one thing for me to do; I must go to New York and report the situation at headquarters."

"We can get the goods away."

"It's easy to say we can get the goods away, but where will we take them?"

"We can load the 'Nancy' down with the most valuable of them."

"That is a good idea, but you can not get to work until to-night."

"We can start in to-night."

"Where will you run her when she's loaded?"

"We can run outside and communicate."

"Do that, and meantime I will go on to New York. There is a one o'clock train from the station on the other side. I will go on that train."

"And we are to load the 'Nancy' to-night?"

"Yes."

The detective overheard the whole of the above conversation, and great drops of perspiration came out upon his forehead. He was in a bad fix after all. Should Denman get to New York ahead of him, he would lose his best grip after all. Something must be done. He must get over to the mainland before one o'clock, in time to take the train with Denman, at all hazards.

Denman and a part of his crew passed from the warehouse while one of the men remarked:

"I've some private property in here to look after and I'll see to it at once."

A smile flitted over the face of the detective. He thought a chance was about to present itself for him to get away.

A moment he lay quiet, and then emerged from his hiding-place.

The warehouse was artificially illuminated by a few swinging lamps, and only one was lighted at the time.

The detective cautiously glanced around. He had prepared himself for the work he had in hand. He saw a light in a distant corner and he cautiously stole toward the light, and came upon a man sorting over the contents of a sailor's ship-sack.

It was a critical moment; life depended upon success, death would follow, sure death, the failure of his plan.

Like a cat creeping toward an unsuspecting bird on a twig, the detective crept toward the smuggler, knowing that when he sprung upon his prey there must be no mistake.

The critical moment was reached, the officer made his leap forward, and seized his man, seized him by the throat, and when once Vance got his grip on a man's throat *silence followed*; no man was ever known to make an outcry with those powerful fingers grasped around his neck.

The man was not a very powerful fellow, fortunately, and the detective easily bore him to the ground. Having secured the man, the detective said:

"I am going to lighten my grip on your throat. I wish to ask you a few questions, answer me promptly and truthfully, and you will save your life; but seek to make an outcry, and you are a dead man. Now wink if you mean to keep quiet and save your life?"

The man winked.

"All right, old fellow, you know the value of your skin, I see, and mark you don't make any mistake, for as certain as you make the least effort to give an alarm, you are a dead man; do you understand? if so, wink."

The man winked.

"That's all right," said the detective; and he released his hold on the man's throat.

The man kept his word. He was not a very nervy chap, and was terrified almost to death, as it was.

"What is your name?" demanded the detective.

"Why do you wish to know my name?"

The man spoke in a loud tone, when the detective said:

"Speak low, old man—very low, or you'll never speak again. Now wink."

The man winked, and the detective said:

"Now tell me your name?"

"My name is Arbella."

"Your name is Arbella?"

"Yes."

"You are one of the crew of the 'Nancy'?"

"No."

"You are not?"

"I am not."

"What are you?"

"I am the doctor on the vessel. I've nothing to do with their business."

"Oh, you're the doctor?"

"I am."

"Well, doctor, you are a lucky man. I did intend to silence you, but I'll just shut you up temporarily: and now mind; if you make the least noise or attempt to offer resistance, you are a dead man!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"I WILL be silent," the man answered.

"I reckon you will, my friend."

As our readers will remember, the detective had arranged to carry out a certain plan before he pounced upon the doctor. Our hero had the knack of making little necessary articles, and he had prepared a gag, which he inserted in the man's mouth after having first bound the fellow's hands under him. After inserting the gag, the detective released the man's hands temporarily, until he had removed the prisoner's outer and upper clothing, when a second time he bound him.

Indeed, our readers have already detected the officer's plan. He had determined to assume the man's clothes, personate him, and risk the chances of an escape. It was a perilous undertaking, but the officer had been taking perilous chances all along.

The change was made, and our detective fancied he had succeeded in making a most excellent "make up" in his "transform," and when all ready he moved toward the door.

He had reached a part where the real peril commenced; but, with his hand on the butt of a cocked revolver, he ascended to the upper room. The apartment was deserted.

"So far so good," muttered the bold man, and he peeped out of the door.

Again fortune favored him.

Two men were stretched out under the bluff asleep, and two more were down close to the shore.

"Now or never!" muttered Vance; and he stepped forth.

Had the men on the shore been close enough they might have discovered that something was wrong; but, at the distance, as they glanced at the detective, they evidently mistook him for Arbella.

The detective did not attempt to slink away—he was too cool and ready-witted. He calmly lit a pipe and wandered around, seemingly in a listless manner; but, at the proper moment, he moved away from the beach and soon disappeared behind some bushes.

"Well done!" was the glad exclamation that fell from his lips.

Once beyond sight he moved along rapidly, and made for the point where he and Taylor had landed the previous night.

Vance reached the spot in safety and stood a moment on the bluff looking for the boat, when he saw a man rowing directly across the bay.

"I hope that fellow lands here," was the detective's muttered exclamation.

The boat Taylor had left for him was gone, and he had made up his mind to appropriate the boat of the rower, in case a chance offered.

He sat intently watching the boat as it came nearer and nearer, and at length a thrill shot through his heart. The danger was passed. He recognized the oarsman—Taylor was in the boat.

The latter rowed straight to the beach and glanced around in a cautious manner, when the detective moved down and hailed him, in a low tone.

Taylor did not recognize the detective at the first glance, and settled down to his oars as though intending to pull off, when our hero called him by name, and an instant later a full recognition had taken place.

"Well," exclaimed Taylor, "you are safe!"

"Yes, I am safe."

"What have you discovered?"

"The whole business."

"And you have not been detected?"

"Oh, yes, I was fallen on several times, but I managed to creep out of a hot spot each time; but come, we have no time to spare."

"You are a fortunate man."

"I shall count myself a fortunate man if I reach the other side of the bay without accident."

"We will go across easy enough; but do you know the 'Nancy' is at her old anchorage?"

"Where she lay last night?"

"Yes."

Taylor was a good oarsman, and in less than an hour the detective was on the mainland.

"Have you any friends around here?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Honest people?"

"Yes."

"Take me to their house."

"Do you wish to find a hiding-place?"

"No; I've other plans than seeking to hide just now."

Taylor led the detective to a friend's house; on the way our hero had partially explained his plans, and had related all the wonderful adventures that had befallen him during the past night.

"You have taken long chances."

"I am used to taking long chances, and I've often done so and gained nothing; but last night's work pays me for all the risk, and, my good friend, you will come in for a nice bit of money."

The two men reached the home of Taylor's friend, and the detective set to work and went through the operation of a deliberate transform. With the assistance of Taylor's friend he secured a complete outfit, and wrought such a marvelous change in his appearance that Taylor and his friend could hardly convince themselves that the man who came forth from the best bedroom was the same man who had entered it a few moments previously.

"You are an extraordinary man," exclaimed Taylor.

"It's all a matter of business, my friend."

"I can well see now why it is you are so willing to take long chances as you call them."

"Well, yes, I've had some experience; but now, friend Taylor, it is not necessary to request you to keep silent concerning my movements, but I want you to watch the movements of the 'Nancy.'"

"She will probably sail away to-day."

"Does she usually go away the day following her night-visit to the coast?"

"Usually, yes."

"She will not sail away to-day, and I want you to watch her and watch any of her crew that may come ashore."

"I am afraid you will get me in trouble before this affair is ended."

"This affair will be ended to-night."

The detective gave Taylor a few instructions and then proceeded to the depot.

Spencer Vance, as he appeared at the little frame station, was as perfect a specimen of a countryman as ever took train from the rural districts for New York.

Ike Denman was at the station. The master of the "Nancy" had also wrought a great change in his personal appearance. He looked little like the man who had stood on the beach across the bay a few hours previously.

It was half an hour previous to the starting of the train when the detective reached the depot, and as he stood around with his hands in his pockets, the master of the "Nancy" several times passed within a few feet of him.

Little did the smuggler captain dream, as he ran his eyes over the rustic-looking passenger, that under that clownish hat was the busy brain that had trailed him and his crew down to such a fine point.

The detective, meantime, was happy, and at the moment little dreamed of the terrible tragedy that had occurred, and which, strangely enough, but awaited his unraveling.

The half hour glided by, and at length the smuggler captain and the detective boarded the train.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE detective acted well his part, and attracted little attention from the master of the "Nancy," until the latter, for lack of something better to do, took a seat beside our hero.

"On your way to the city?"

"Yes."

"Do you go often?"

"No."

"You live at G——?"

"No."

"Where do you live?"

"On the island."

"You live on the island?"

"Yes."

"I often go to the island: don't remember ever having seen you."

"I've been off on a trip."

"A trip?"

"Yes."

"Where to?"

"Connecticut."

The master of the "Nancy" laughed, and said:

"Do you call that a trip?"

"Yes; I was away from the island two years."

"What's your name?"

The countryman looked the master of the "Nancy" all over, winking knowingly, and said:

"You can not come that over me!"

"Come what over you?"

"Oh, I'm no fool! I know how you Yorkers work the trains."

"You know how we Yorkers work the trains?"

"Yes."

"What do we work them for?"

"Suckers; but I'm no fool! You can't come any of your smart games over me. I've lived a couple of years in Hartford; I'm posted!"

"So you think I'm a Yorker?"

"Of course I do."

"What makes you think so?"

"You look like one."

"You're a smart Alec, my friend from Connecticut."

"Do you think so?"

"I reckon you think so yourself."

"Mebbe I do; and I'm too smart for you."

"I reckon you are."

"Yes, I am, as you'll find."

"I've found it out already."

"I reckon you have."

"Do you go clean through to the city?"

"Yes, I do."

"Where do you hang out?"

"I haven't made up my mind."

The pretended countryman assumed a very knowing look.

The master of the "Nancy" was amused; he thought he had struck a character. Well, he had, but he had no idea of the real character of the man; he thought he was joking for amusement.

"Were you ever 'nipped' by a Yorker, my friend?"

"No siree, and I don't mean to be."

"So you live on the island?"

"Yes."

"And you won't tell me your name?"

"No, I won't."

"What harm would there be in telling your name?"

"You're too anxious to learn my name. What's *your* name?"

"My name is King."

"Your name is King, eh?"

"Yes."

"You live in York?"

"No, I don't."

"You don't?"

"No."

"Where do you live?"

"On the island."

"You live on the island?"

"Yes."

"Never heard of any one by the name of King on the island."

"You never did?"

"Never."

"That's strange."

"No, it ain't strange, because no one by the name of King ever lived there."

"Do you know a family by the name of Manuel?"

"See here, Mr. King, you can't pump me."

"I am not pumping you, I am only asking you civil questions."

"I am not answering civil questions to-day."

"Well, you are a crank."

"A what?"

"A crank."

"What's a crank?"

"A fool."

"You call me a fool?"

"Yes."

The detective rose to his feet, assumed a fierce expression and retorted:

"You're another."

The master of the "Nancy" had expected an assault when the countryman assumed such a threatening attitude, and was compelled to laugh when the danger simmered down to a mere retort.

Ike Denman was amusing himself, and so was the detective.

"I reckon I've met you before," said the disguised officer.

"You think you've met me before?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"Can't recall just now, but the faint remembrance don't bring me a pleasant feeling."

"You are a fool," exclaimed Denman, and rising from his seat beside the disguised detective he walked to the other end of the car.

At length the train ran into the depot at Brooklyn, and the few passengers went aboard the boat that was to convey them to the city.

The detective was a happy man. He had accomplished a big feat, and little dreamed of the terrible discovery he was destined to make later on.

Upon reaching the city, Denman started down town and entered a building occupied by a foreign importing house.

The detective was at his wits' end. He was anxious to overhear what passed between the master of the "Nancy" and the members of the firm. In a moment his decision was made, and it was founded on a cunning line of reasoning.

Our hero entered the store just as the private office door closed behind Denman.

A gentleman came forward and demanded the seeming countryman's business, and the detective asked to see one of the members of the firm, calling him by name, having learned the same from the sign over the door.

"He is busy," was the answer.

That was just the answer the detective had expected, and it was in anticipation of such an answer that he boldly walked in and ventured the inquiry.

"When will he be at leisure?"

"It is hard to tell."

The clerk knew Denman and suspected that it was private and important business that had brought the master of the "Nancy" to New York.

"I wish to see him particularly."

"Can I not attend to the business for Mr. M——?"

"No sir; I must see Mr. M—— personally."

"Can you call again?"

"I will wait."

"He may be engaged a long time."

"I can not help it, I must see him to-day, and it does not make much difference; I am in no hurry, I can wait as well as not."

The clerk walked away and our hero edged toward the office situated at the rear of the store, and seated himself upon a case of goods, resting directly against the office partition.

A glass casing only separated the detective from the members of the firm and the master of the "Nancy," and he could overhear all that passed.

The clerk meantime was busy in the forward part of the store, and paid no heed to the stupid-looking countryman.

Spencer Vance was well repaid for his risks. He overheard the names of several firms, and got down facts which made it a dead open and shut case.

At length he recognized that the conference was about reaching a conclusion, and he came another sharp trick.

CHAPTER XXX.

As our readers have discerned, the detective had no desire to see the member of the firm whom he had asked for; it had been merely a game to gain an opportunity to listen to what occurred between the capitalists and the master of the "Nancy."

When Vance saw that the conference was about terminating, he walked to the front of the store, and said:

"I will not wait; I will call in again."

"If your business is important you had better wait. He can not be engaged a much longer time."

"I will call again."

"Very well."

The detective walked out. He had "coppered" all he required for the time being. He took up his position a short distance from the store, and awaited the reappearance of Denman upon the street. He was not compelled to wait very long, as the master of the "Nancy" soon appeared, and the detective fell upon his trail.

Denman walked up town a short distance, and stopped in a well-known bar-room, and the detective again got in on a little wait. The master of the "Nancy" did not remain long in the bar-room, and soon again appeared upon the street, when the detective approached him.

"Hello, King," called Vance, "haven't you gone back yet?"

The master of the "Nancy" turned and recognized the countryman whom he had called a "crank" on the train.

"Where did you come from?"

"I saw you come out of that place, and I thought I'd like to have a few words with you."

"I have no time."

"Oh, yes· you can spare a few moments."

"Probably you know my business better than I do."

"I know you're in no hurry; you're not going out on the island to-night."

"I am not going out on the island to-night?"

"No."

"Well, you're a 'no-such-thing'!"

"Come and have a beer?"

"I have no time, I tell you."

"It will not take you a minute; and I've something to tell you."

"You've something to tell me?"

"Yes."

"What have *you* to say to me?"

"Something very important."

"What are you giving me now?"

"Facts. Come along; I've a surprise for you."

The master of the "Nancy" was amused and at the same time mystified. He could not dream what the countryman could have to say to him.

"Come along," said Vance.

"You have something to tell me?"

"Yes."

"Tell me here."

"No; I want to sit down. It's a long story."

A curious look came over the smuggler's face, and, for the first time, a faint suspicion crossed his mind.

"Where will we go?" he asked.

"Oh, here's a place."

The two men entered a beer saloon, the rear yard of which had been converted into a garden, over which an awning was stretched. They took a seat and Denman demanded in an impatient tone:

"Well, what have you to say to me?"

There was no one in the garden but the two men; the waiter had brought the beer and had gone away.

"You asked me what my name was on the train?"

"Yes, I did."

"I wouldn't tell you?"

"No."

"Well, do you know why?"

"No."

"You ought to know my name; you and I have met before; can't you tell where?"

The detective all the time had preserved his rustic tones and demeanor.

"You and I have met before?"

"Yes."

"When and where?"

"Several times."

"Where?"

"Ah, you must guess."

The master of the "Nancy" studied the detective's face.

"I do not remember ever having seen you before."

"Nonsense."

"You are having some fun at my expense."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes."

"Well; I am in dead earnest."

"Where did we meet before?"

"The last time we met I promised you we would meet again."

A fierce look shot into Denman's eyes as he permitted his glance to roam around the garden.

He was studying what the chances would be under certain contingencies.

"As I don't know you, do you know me?"

"You told me your name was King."

"Is that my name?"

"No."

"What is my name?"

"Denman," came the answer in a low, firm tone.

The master of the "Nancy" turned deadly pale. He realized that something was up, and it came to him that the seeming countryman, after all, was a man as keen and resolute as himself.

"You say my name is Denman?"

"Yes."

"You are sure?"

"I am."

"What's my business?"

"You're the master of the 'Nancy.'"

Denman made a certain significant motion with his hand, when the detective whispered:

"*Don't!*"

There was a world of significance in that little word "*Don't!*"

"Who are you?"

"Can't you guess?"

"I'm not guessing to-day."

"Sorry."

"What is your business with me?"

"I wanted to tell you that I knew who you were."

"Is that all?"

"No."

"What else?"

"I wanted you to know that I am a man who keeps his word."

"Is your word passed to me?"

"Yes."

"What is your promise?"

"I promised to meet you again."

"I don't recall."

"Don't you perceive?"

"Perceive what?"

"That you are in a bad hole."

Again the master of the "Nancy" made a certain movement, when the detective repeated in a peculiar warning tone:

"Don't."

"You are a revenue officer?" said Denman.

"Aha! now you begin to open up!"

"What is your business with me?"

"*You are my prisoner!*"

"No, no, my friend!"

"Yes, yes, Denman."

Matters were approaching a critical climax.

Denman attempted to rise from his seat.

"Sit down!" commanded the detective.

"My friend," said Denman, "don't fly your kite too high, your string may be cut."

The smuggler spoke in a warning tone.

"Sit down," repeated the detective.

Denman realized that he was facing a man who was well prepared at every turn.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"I am your old friend Ballard!" came the reply.

CHAPTER XXXI

DENMAN showed signs of great excitement and trepidation.

Our readers will remember that the smuggler had never identified Spencer Vance and Ballard as one and the same man; and, when suspicions were aroused as to the identity of the disguised detective, it never once entered Denman's head that he was sitting *vis-à-vis* with Ballard.

"You are Ballard?"

"I am Ballard."

"Are you man or devil?"

"I suppose you think I ought to be floating on the sea?"

"I thought you were at the bottom of the sea, and how you escaped to face me I can't tell."

"I'll tell you all about it some day, Denman, but, in the meantime, do you mean fight, or does your flag come down?"

"My flag comes down. The game is up with me."

"Well, sit down."

The smuggler sat down.

"I've got the thing down pretty fine on you, Denman."

"I should say so. You were on the island?"

"I was."

"You are the man who laid out some of the crew?"

"I am the culprit."

"You beat 'em all!"

"Well, I reckon I've run this racket pretty well."

"How did you get ashore?"

"You wouldn't believe."

"I'll take your word for anything."

"I swam ashore."

"You're a good swimmer."

"I am."

"How did you snake us out down at the island?"

"I've been picking up facts for some time."

"Spencer Vance and you were 'laying in' together?"

"Well, yes."

"Where is Vance?"

"He is here?"

"Where?"

"I am Vance!"

"What!" ejaculated the smuggler.

"Ballard and Vance both wear the same hats."

"This does get me."

"Yes, I reckon I've got you."

"And now, what's your play?"

"You will go to Ludlow Street."

We will explain to our rural readers that Ludlow Street is the location of a prison where all revenue prisoners are confined.

Denman had been in Ludlow Street. He knew well enough what the detective's declaration meant.

"How about bail?"

"No bail."

"I've good bondsmen."

"That's all right."

A moment Denman was silent and thoughtful, but at length said

"Are you on the make?"

"What have you to offer?"

"You can drop to a big sum."

"How big?"

"Three or four thousand."

The detective smiled, and answered:

"I'm in for more than that; remember the value of what's in your store-house on the island."

"You have that down?"

"I've been in there; your crew know it by this time if they have rummaged around any. I was there when you decided to come on to New York and notify your principals."

The smuggler gazed at the detective with an expression of wonderment upon his face.

"You were there?"

"Yes."

"Where were you when we searched?"

"I was stowed away."

"And we missed you?"

"If you hadn't I would not be here now."

"You're right. I'm blowed if you don't get me, but you're entitled to win. Still we can come to a compromise."

"How will you manage it, Denman?"

"I will take you to the principals."

The detective mentioned the names of several of the firms.

Denman's eyes opened wider and wider.

"You tracked me well."

"Yes, I did."

"Will you open up for negotiation?"

"No."

"What is to be done?"

"You must open up."

The smuggler did not make an immediate reply.

"What have you to say?"

"I can't promise anything."

"I've got everything dead."

"I see you have."

"Then it's for you to lay in for all the favors you can get."

"There's nothing I can give away, you have it all."

"Are you ready?"

"For what?"

"To go to Ludlow Street."

"Is there no chance for a deal?"

"None whatever."

"All right, I'm passive."

"Understand me, Denman, I'll have my eye on you; if you go quietly it's all right; if you attempt any capers down you go."

"I am passive."

"It's all right then, come."

The two men rose, and any casual customer in that garden would never have imagined that a thrilling drama in real life was being enacted right then and there, and that two remarkable men had played a thrilling part.

The men reached Ludlow Street. Denman was given in charge, and the detective called a cab and started down town. Our hero was still in the garb of the countryman. He entered the United States District Attorney's office and accosted a dandy clerk.

"Where is the district attorney?"

"What do you want of him?"

"I'll tell him when I see him."

"Can't see him to-day."

"What's that?"

"Can't see him to-day."

"Is he in?"

"You've got your answer."

The detective approached the political dude and said:

"Will you answer my questions?"

"Come, my friend, you get, or—"

"Or what?"

"I'll hustle you."

"You will hustle me, eh?"

"Yes."

The detective suddenly extended his strong, powerful arm and quick as a wink caught the political exquisite by the ear and he closed his vise-like grip.

The young fellow squealed like a pig.

Vance released him and said

"Will you answer my questions civilly?"

"Who are you?" demanded the clerk, as he vigorously rubbed his ear.

"Go and tell the district attorney I wish to see him."

"What name, sir?"

"Vance."

The clerk entered an inner office and a moment later reappeared, and in the most obsequious manner possible said:

"This way, sir."

"Ah, you have come to an understanding of your duty."

"I beg your pardon, if you had told me who you were I would have notified the district attorney at once."

"You would, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, young man, let to-day's experience be a warning to you all your life, and from this time out treat every one with civility who treats you civilly."

A moment later, Vance the detective stood in the presence of the Government attorney.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE two men were intimate. Vance was operating directly under the orders of the attorney, and the latter was not surprised to see him appear under any guise.

"Well, Vance," exclaimed the district attorney, extending his hand, "I'm glad to see you. What news?"

"Good."

"Aha, I'm glad to hear it; you've struck a trail, eh?"

"Yes."

"A good one?"

"Pretty good," answered the detective, dryly.

"Well, let's hear all about it."

"I've collared the whole business."

"What?" ejaculated the Government attorney.

Vance repeated his declaration.

"You collared the whole business?"

"Yes."

"What do you mean?"

"All that the words imply."

"Tell me all about it."

The detective in a rapid manner related his adventures, and as he proceeded the Government attorney opened his eyes wider and wider, and when the officer had concluded the attorney exclaimed.

"This is wonderful."

"It's a pretty good thing for us."

"I should *say so*. But you must bear a charmed life!"

"No, no, I'm only a little watchful against accidents and sudden surprises."

"And you have the master of the 'Nancy' up in Ludlow Street?"

"He's there sure."

"How does he take the thing?"

"He's all done over."

"Inclined to talk?"

"I reckon you can make him talk."

"I'll visit him at once."

"Not so soon; what you want to do is to capture the 'Nancy' and place a guard over the warehouse."

"You're right."

"You will have to secure a special train; and now when will you be ready?"

"In two hours."

"All right, I will be at the train."

The attorney went away to make all the arrangements for a grand seizure. He had the names of all the principals, who were first put under surveillance, under the "shadow" of a number of Government officers, and then all the other arrangements were completed.

It was seven o'clock in the evening when the special train ran out of the depot, carrying twenty armed men besides the United States attorney, and our hero, who was in command of the party.

Four hours later the party were ready to embark across the bay to the island.

Our hero met his friend Taylor

"Well, old man, what have you to report?"

"The 'Nancy' weighed anchor only half an hour ago."

"Were you on the track of any of the crew to-day?"

"They were around the village."

"Did they drop anything?"

"Not a word."

The party were soon landed on the island. Taylor did not accompany them, as the detective did not desire to involve his confederate in any future trouble.

The party were marched toward the rendezvous, and had gone but a short distance when the detective, in a low tone, ordered a halt. He had discovered one of the smuggler sentinels, toward whom he advanced.

The man commanded our hero to halt.

The detective came to a halt, and said:

"What do you want?"

"Where do you go?"

"Is there a war round here, that you send out sentinels to stop quiet people?"

"Who are you, and where do you go?"

"That's none of your business!"

"I give you two minutes to answer."

"Only two minutes?"

"One!" called the man.

"You're crazy!" said the detective.

"Two!" called the man.

The detective uttered a signal-whistle call, and seven or eight men sprung forward.

The sentinel stood paralyzed.

"Why don't you call three?" demanded Vance.

The man made no reply.

"I had an idea that war had been declared, so I brought my troop this way."

The man made a movement as though about to run away, when Vance said:

"Don't move, my friend, or you will be dropped."

The detective advanced toward the fellow, who saw at once that resistance was in vain.

The man was disarmed and a pair of handcuffs were slipped on his wrists.

"The jig's up," muttered the smuggler.

"Yes, my friend, the jig is up."

The party moved on and soon came in sight of the smugglers, who were running out goods to be put on board of the "Nancy."

The detective advanced straight into their midst.

The smuggiers were taken all aback, and some of them started to move away, when the detective called out:

"The first man that moves will be shot down!"

The men did not move.

If they had been under a leader they might have shown fight, but as they did not know exactly what force had been brought against them, they were afraid to open a scrimmage.

The Government attorney at a signal stepped forward, and announced that all the men were prisoners to the United States Government, and the wholesale handcuffing of the crew of the "Nancy" followed.

The men did not offer any resistance, but submitted like lambs.

A boat load of men pulled out and took possession of the "Nancy," and the work of Vance in that direction was at an end.

We will not dwell upon the mere formal movements that followed the "closing-in" on the smugglers. A guard was placed over the warehouse, a guard remained on the "Nancy," and, three hours later, the detective and the district attorney were returning to New York on a special train.

We will merely state that the whole affair was turned over to the Collector of the Port of New York. A revenue cutter was dispatched to the island; and, later on, all the goods were formally condemned, and removed to the city.

The detective had covered himself with glory, and had ascended to the first rank of Government specials; but, after all, the hardest part of his duties remained to be accomplished.

Spencer Vance was detained in New York all of the day following the seizure at the island; but, upon the following evening, he started for the fishing village down on the coast, where he had parted from the lovely Renie under such strange and startling circumstances.

Our hero had not forgotten the strangely beautiful girl, nor the thrilling and romantic incidents attending her career; and, having performed his whole duty to the Government, and having practically made an immense fortune at one stroke, he felt at liberty to devote a little time to private detective work.

He was determined to find the missing box which was supposed to contain the testimonies and proofs as to the girl's parentage. It was a difficult duty, and many thrilling adventures attended its performance.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ALL the perils were not removed from the detective's peril, because of the arrest of the master of the "Nancy" and his crew. The men actively engaged on the yacht were not all the parties interested directly or indirectly in the contraband business.

In going to the coast the detective's peril was even greater than upon former visits, as the worst passions of the remaining part of the gang were fully aroused.

The detective was to be the principal witness against the smugglers, and could he be removed the Government would be without the necessary proofs for the conviction of the principals and the condemnation of the captured contraband goods.

The interest was far reaching, and a powerful body of men were comprised, and within twenty-four hours of the public knowledge of the arrests, fully twenty ruffians were on the lookout for Spencer Vance.

The capitalists had many friends, and they possessed money, and besides some had previously borne excellent characters, and all their safety depended upon the *silencing* of the detective.

Our hero understood his peril, and although, as our readers know, he was a brave, fearless man, still he had requested a speedy trial of the guilty, as, after he had sworn to his evidence in open court, there would remain no such great incentive for getting him out of the way.

Millions in money, and dozens of reputations depended upon his testimony, and one of the most powerful and wealthy organizations in the United States was arrayed against him; not arrayed in open warfare, but secretly arrayed, and their purpose was to get rid of him.

As stated, our hero knew his peril and knew when he started in just what he would have to face, but he went straight ahead, and when the storm broke he was prepared.

We have stated that twenty ruffians were upon his track, and the statement was no exaggeration.

Spencer Vance went under cover—immediately assumed a rôle different from any under which he had appeared during any time that he was trailing down the smugglers.

Our hero was, "when unadorned," or rather when not under any sort of disguise, a really handsome and delicate-featured man, and although a man of extraordinary strength, he was not an over-sized man, but on the contrary a little under the average height; but he was a full-blooded, resolute, athletic fellow all the same, and well equal to the duties of his perilous profession.

From the very moment that the arrests were publicly known the detective was on his guard, and that same night had a genuine intimation of his danger.

The detective wanted to see a certain man in the Government employ, and went down to a Government building situated on the Battery near South Ferry. He had gotten himself up as a night-watchman, hoping in that way to escape observation.

Vance saw his man and left the building, and was proceeding across the Battery, when he observed that he was being followed. The officer at once suspected that there was a possibility that some one of the scoundrels had "tumbled" to his identity, and he resolved to "shake" the ruffian at once. Changing his course, he walked over toward the sea, on the North River side of the park, and stood leaning over the hand-rail, when a man sauntered up alongside.

"A pleasant evening," said the new-comer.

It was still early in the evening.

The detective did not make an immediate reply, but, scanned the speaker from head to feet. He was seeking to ascertain whether or not he recognized the man.

The fellow was a foreigner—an ugly looking chap, and just such a villain as could be employed for any sort of desperate work for pay.

The detective made up his mind to feel his man; and should he discover that the fellow really did not know him, and was dogging him, he was resolved to clap the darbies on him.

"Yes, it's a pleasant evening," said the detective, slowly.

"Hard times for poor men now," remarked the stranger.

"So they tell me," answered Vance.

"You're all right," said the man.

"How am I all right?"

"Oh, you fellows in Government employ always get your money and have a good chance for pickings."

The detective eyed the man's face and answered:

"I do not get much of a chance to pick anything."

"I thought you fellows had a good show."

"How do you know I'm in the Government employ?"

"You are, I reckon."

"Mebbe I am."

"You're a night-watchman."

"Well, suppose I am."

"Don't you fellows get a chancge for pickings?"

"Not much."

The man drew closer to the detective; the latter was fully on his guard, and had the stranger attempted any funny business just at that moment he would have been downed so quick he never would have known what struck him.

"You can make some big pickings if you want to, my friend."

"I can?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"Do you want to make a few dollars?"

"Well, I don't mind if I do, honestly."

"You can honestly."

"How?"

"You are acquainted with most of the men in the Government service?"

"Mebbe I am."

"You've been a long time in the service?"

"Well, yes."

"There's a man I want to become acquainted with, and mebbe you know him."

"Mebbe I do."

The detective took to the game at once, and he was prepared to let the fellow run out his reel.

"The man can do me a service."

"Why don't you go and tell him so?"

"It won't do for me to approach him openly."

"See here, Johnny, you're on some crooked game."

"My game is straight enough."

"What are you getting at?"

"I've some valuable information for the Government."

"Why don't you take it to the collector of the port?"

"No, no; I did once, and all I got was thanks, and those are all right in their place, but they don't pay me."

"What is it you are getting at?"

"I want to get paid for my information."

The detective laughed and said:

"I ain't paying anything for my information."

"That's all right, but you can put me on the right track to get paid, and I'll pay you."

"How can I help you?"

"I want to lay in with one of the Government detectives. I'm told those fellows have a chance at a secret service fund, and can give a man money where the collector can't do it."

"That's so."

"And I want to get in with one of the Government detectives."

"That is easy enough, you don't need any help for that, my man."

The little game was opening up fast.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE man drew closer to the detective, and said:

"You don't understand how the thing works."

"You want to see one of the detectives?"

"Yes."

"Well, it's easy enough; go to any of the deputy collectors or any of the inspectors, and they will give you the names of several."

"That's neither here nor there; do you want to make a few dollars?"

"Yes."

"All right, I'm going to give you a chance."

"Go ahead."

"I want to see one particular officer."

"Which particular officer?"

'Vance."

"You want to see Vance?"

"Yes."

"Go and tell the collector."

"That won't do."

"Why not?"

"I've been sold once, and this time I'm going to work my racket differently; do you know Vance by sight?"

"Do you mean Spencer Vance?"

"Yes."

"I know him, and I'll introduce you to him if you want me to do so."

"I do not want you to introduce me."

"What do you want?"

"I want you to point him out to me."

"I haven't time to run around to point him out to you."

"I can make it worth your while."

"For how much?"

"Fifty dollars."

"I don't understand what you're getting at."

"I can't explain, but I'll give you fifty dollars to point that man out to me."

"You will give me fifty dollars?"

"Yes."

"I can earn that fifty dollars easy."

"I don't care how easy you earn it."

"But I don't understand your game."

"I've told you. I've got some valuable information—some 'tips' that Vance will pay big money to 'nip;' but I want my own way and time of opening up the subject to him, and I mean to make sure that my money is good."

"Why are you so anxious to deal with Vance?"

"I've been told he has got the inside track with the Government, and that he is a square man."

"That's the reason you want him?"

"Yes."

"And you will pay me fifty dollars to point him out to you?"

"I will."

"Must I wait for my money until you get your rake?"

"No."

"You will pay me right down?"

"I will pay you the money two minutes after you point the man out to me."

"Do you want an introduction?"

"No."

"Come along; I will put you on to him right away."

The two men started over toward the ferries.

"Will you stand a carriage?" asked the detective.

"What do you want of a carriage?"

"I must get back to go on duty."

"We don't want any carriage."

The man was struck with a shade of suspicion.

"Where are we to go?"

"To Ludlow Street."

The man started back and turned pale.

"To Ludlow Street!" he ejaculated.

"Yes."

"What do you mean?"

"Come with me to Ludlow Street, and I will point out Vance to you."

"See here, Johnny, you are up to a smart trick, you are."

"Am I?"

"Yes."

"What is it you're up to, my friend?"

The man looked around. No one was near. The detective was studying the rascal's movements.

The fellow suddenly drew a club; but he was matched.

"Hold on! What do you mean?" he demanded.

"What do *you* mean? Drop that club."

"Who are you?"

"I'm the man you're looking for, Johnny."

"The man I'm looking for?"

"Yes."

"Who are you?"

"I'm Vance."

"Oh, go 'long!" exclaimed the ruffian, in a derisive tone.

"I'm your man! Now, what information have you got for me?"

"You can't play me," said the fellow.

"No; nor can you play me. Listen; how much are you to get for laying me out?"

The man turned pale and made no answer; he glanced backward; it was evident he had reached the conclusion that it was time for him to leave.

"Don't think of going, Johnny, I want you to answer my question."

"You are not Vance."

"I'll play Vance for you, so sling out your game, Johnny."

The man took a step back.

"Stand where you are," came the command, "or I'll make you."

"Are you really Vance?"

"Come up to Ludlow Street, and I'll prove who I am."

"I ain't going that way."

"Oh, yes, you are; you've run right into my grip, and I'm going to shut you in with the rest of them, unless—"

The detective stopped.

"Unless what?"

"Unless you open up and tell me the *whole story*."

The fellow had a wicked eye. He saw that he had run into a snap, and he was determined to take a desperate chance to get out of it.

"I'm in for it," he remarked.

The detective had been watching the varying changes of expression upon the man's face, and dropped to the fact that the fellow contemplated some desperate expedient.

"I reckon, old man, the best thing for you to do is to own up, make a clean breast of it."

"Are you really Vance, or have I run against some other Government dandy?"

"I am Vance."

"I wish I were sure, old man, and I'd put you on the biggest lay of your life."

"You're safe to give me any information you possess."

"But if I let on to you I want to make sure of my 'rake in.'"

"About as sure as I am for the fifty dollars."

The man laughed, and said:

"Well, this is a nice joke all round."

"Yes, a nice joke," repeated the detective in a peculiarly significant tone.

"But," said the man, "I have some valuable information for Vance."

"And so have I some valuable information for you, Mister Man, and now throw up your hands."

"You are not in earnest," said the man, and he approached a step nearer.

"You will find out I am in earnest."

"Do you really intend to take me to Ludlow Street?"

"I do."

"Not to-night," exclaimed the man, and he sprung upon the detective, but he might as well have leaped head first at a hornet's nest.

The detective was ready for the man, and he brought him to his knees upon the grass, and an instant later the darbies were on him.

The man squealed like a pig, but the conviction was forced upon his mind that he had met Vance.

CHAPTER XXXV.

HAVING laid out the scoundrel, Vance bid the fellow follow, and taking him to Ludlow Street he left him in charge.

On the way to the jail the man begged like a trooper to be released, plead that he was only joking, and that he was really only a "crank," but the detective's invariable reply was:

"I know you, and until you 'open up' and tell who employed you to 'shadow' me, you will be kept close."

Our hero learned from the incident the terrible risks that threatened him, and he determined to be even more careful.

It was midnight when Spencer Vance arrived on the coast. He had crossed the bay alone to the outer coast and proceeded toward the cabin of old Tom Pearce.

It was a windy rainy night, and as disagreeable as could be, and, indeed, it was desolate enough without the roar of the breakers as they lashed themselves upon the beach.

The detective was proceeding along when he was suddenly summoned to a halt.

The detective at once suspected trouble, and his ready hand went to his pocket as a man covered with a rubber coat and slouched hat approached.

"Good-evening, stranger," said the man in the rubber coat.

"Good-evening," was the response.

"Are you acquainted around here?"

"Well, I should say I was a little."

"Do you know a fisherman around here by the name of Pearce?"

"What do you want of Mr. Pearce?"

"Ah, you know him!"

"I haven't said so."

"But you do."

"Mebbe I do."

"Will you guide me to his house?"

"I don't know whether I will or not."

"I will pay you for your time."

"You will?"

"Yes."

"Where did you come from, stranger?"

"That's my business."

"Is it? Well, it's my business not to guide you to Tom Pearce's cottage."

"Hang it, you are a surly lot around here."

"You are a surly lot yourself."

"I only wish to be guided to a man's cabin."

"Well, if you would give a little information you might receive in return a great deal more."

"You can not expect a stranger to tell his business to every man he meets."

"No; but will you tell me how long you have been on the coast?"

"Why do you ask?"

"As a good Samaritan."

"I do not understand you, neighbor."

"I wish to discover whether or not you are a stranger around here."

"What difference does that make?"

"It might make considerable."

"How?"

"This is a dangerous place for strangers just now."

"Why?"

"The people around here are not taking well to strangers. They entertained one lately, and he got them into a great deal of trouble."

"How so?"

"He proved to be a Government spy; and every stranger that comes to the coast is watched."

"This is a strange statement you are making to me."

"I am warning you."

"You are making sport of me, I fear."

"I am not."

"Are you an honest man?"

"I am."

"I should judge so, if what you tell me is true. A rogue would not warn me."

"What I tell you is true; and because I am an honest man I warn you."

"If you will lead me to the cabin of Tom Pearce all will be well."

"Is the old boatman a friend of yours?"

"Yes."

"Have you seen him lately?"

"No."

"You have not seem him for a long time?"

"I have not seen him for twelve or thirteen years."

A weird suspicion flashed across the detective's mind, and he determined to have some further talk with the man in the rubber coat before he told him where old Tom Pearce resided.

"Is it Tom Pearce you want to see?"

"Yes."

"I will take you to where you can find him."

"To his house?"

"No."

"Where?"

"To a tavern where he resorts."

"I would prefer to see him at his house."

"Do you wish to see him or his daughter?"

The man gave a perceptible start, and demanded:

"Why do you ask that question?"

"I thought it was a good time to put it to you."

"I wish to see Tom Pearce?"

"Then you do not care to see his daughter?"

"Has he a daughter?"

"He has a girl living with him."

"Do you know the girl?"

"Well, I should say I did!"

"What sort of a girl is she?"

"She's a daisy!"

"A what?" ejaculated the stranger.

"A daisy."

"What do you mean?"
"Just what I say—she's a daisy."
"I do not understand you."
"She's a harum-scarum creature, wild as a hawk and as ugly as a star-fish."
"She is a handsome girl, I suppose?"
"About as handsome as a flounder."
"She is not a pretty girl?"
"Is a flounder a pretty fish?"
"I should say not."
"Then your question is answered.'
"Is she a good girl?"
"Good for nothing."

"I see you do not like the girl," remarked the stranger, but he spoke in a sad and disappointed tone.
"I like her well enough."
"Will you lead me to the boatman's cabin?"
"I will on one condition."
"Name your condition."
"You will tell me how long you have been on the coast."
"Half an hour."

"Have you spoken to any one besides me?"
"No, not since I crossed the bay."
"Why did you say they were a surly people around here?"
"I was speaking of the people across on the mainland."
"And you have not spoken to any one over here?"

"To no one but yourself."
"Come, I will act as your guide."
"I will pay you well."
"How well?"
"I will give you five dollars."
"All right, come along."
"Have we far to go?"
"Not far."
"We will find the old fisherman abed?"
"I reckon so."
"Will it be well to arouse him?"
"Suppose we arouse the girl?"
"Can you do that?"
"Why, certainly."

The man came to a halt, and for a moment appeared to be lost in deep consideration, but, at length, he aroused himself and made a startling proposition.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

As intimated, a weird suspicion had crossed the detective's mind, and he was acting with a purpose.

The man, after indulging in a few moments' silent thought as described, said:

"Do you think it possible to communicate with the girl alone?"
"Yes."
"You say you are an honest man?"
"I am."

"You can make a large sum of money honestly if you choose."
"How much?"
"Twenty-five dollars."
"What must I do for the money?"
"Can I trust you?"
"You can trust me when I pass my word."
"I would like to talk to the girl alone for a few moments."

"And you want me to bring her here?"
"Yes."
"And you will give me twenty-five dollars?"
"Yes."
"Will you tell me what you want with the girl?"
"No."
"See here, stranger, I know something about that girl."

"What do you know about her?"
"She is not the daughter of Tom Pearce."
"Is that so?"
"That is the fact."
"Whose daughter is she, my friend?"
"She may be your daughter," came the abrupt answer.
"My daughter!" ejaculated the man.
"Yes."
"Why do you say that, my good friend?"
"Why do you wish to see her alone?"
"I wish to ask her some questions."
"Ah, I see; you wish to ask her about the box."

The man leaped to his feet and showed signs of great agitation.

"What do you mean?" he demanded, in a trembling tone of voice.
"I mean just what I say."
"You said something about a box."
"Yes."

"Well, what about the box?"
"You wish to ask the girl about it?"
"About the box?"
"Yes."

"Young man, you're crazy. I reckon I do not know anything about any box."
"Oh, yes, you do."
"Which box is it?"
"The box filled with jewels and other rare gems and valuables."

The man approached close to the detective, and whispered.

"Has my daughter got such a box?"
"Your daughter!" exclaimed the detective.
"My friend, I have a strange story to tell. I suspect that the girl is my long-lost daughter."
"You're a fraud," was the idea that ran through the detective's mind. He had observed that the man did not claim Renie as his daughter until an allusion was made to the box of jewels.

"If she is your daughter you ought to know all about the box."
"So I do."
"You know all about it, eh?"
"Yes."
"You know where it is?"
"No. It was left with the child."
"Ah, you know that much!"
"If it is my child we are talking about, I know all about it. But tell me; is the box in the girl's possession?"

"I reckon we might find it."
"Go and bring the girl to me, and you shall have a hundred dollars."
"I don't know about that; I am afraid you are not an honest man."
"What do you mean?"
"My words are plain enough. Tell me your story."

"I will tell it to the girl."
"In my presence?"
"Why should I tell it in your presence? It's none of your business."
"Oh, yes, it is."
"How?"

"I'm looking after the girl's interests."
"Who are you?"
"I am her friend."
"Her friend only?"
"That's all."
"Do you wish to earn the hundred dollars?"
"I do not care anything about the money; but I wish to see justice done the girl."
"She may look for justice at the h..ds of her father?"

"Not the father who has deserted her for thirteen or fourteen years."
"That can all be explained."
"Give me a satisfactory explanation, and I will go and bring the girl to you."
"I will explain to her."
"Explain to me."
"No, sir!"
"Very well; clear out, then."
"I think you are a meddlesome young scamp."

"You first addressed me."
"I only asked you a simple question."
"And I've answered you in the most simple manner."
"Take me to the girl's reputed father."
"That is fair; I will do that."
"You are a foolish young man."
"How so?"
"You might make a large sum of money."
"By bringing the girl to you?"
"Yes."
"I will not do it."
"You will lead me to the fisherman's cabin?"
"Yes."
"All right."

The two men started across the sands, and, after half an hour's walking, came in sight of the cabin of the old fisherman.

"That is the cabin."
"Over there?"
"Yes."
"There are no lights in the cabin."
"They have all retired, probably."
"I promised you five dollars."
"For what?"
"For leading me to the cabin."
"Never mind the money."
"Yes, you must take it."
"I will not."
"I go to the cabin alone."
"I go with you."
"Not one step."
"Who will stop me?"
"I will."
"Not to-night."

"Go and bring the girl to me."
"You have changed your mind?"
"Yes."
"Can I be present during your interview with the girl?"
"Yes."

"All right, I will go and see if I can arouse her without disturbing her father."
"I will wait here?"
"Yes."
"You will return at once?"
"Yes."
"Go."

The detective walked toward the cabin, and as he approached a chill passed over his frame. He recognized certain indices that aroused the gravest apprehensions, and a moment later when he entered the cabin a most terrible and ghastly spectacle met his gaze.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

As stated in a preceding chapter, no lights gleamed from the low cabin windows when Vance and the stranger arrived in sight of the home of Tom Pearce.

At the moment it struck the detective as rather strange, as he knew it was the fashion of the old boatman to set a light for the night, as sailors do on board their vessels as the sun goes down at sea, and it was not without some misgivings that he advanced alone toward the cottage.

The detective had determined to arouse old Pearce, and in collusion with the old boatman send Renie out to interview the man in the rubber coat.

As also intimated our hero had reached certain conclusions regarding the stranger, and in his own mind he felt assured that the man was urged by some ulterior motive.

It was in a cautious manner that Vance pushed open the cabin door; all was darkness within; no light had been set, and the detective stood but a second, when a cold chill struck to his very vitals that caused him to recoil.

An ejaculation of amazement fell from his lips as he quickly drew his ever-ready masked lantern; one moment he stood irresolute, and then advanced again to the cabin door. He thrust forward his lantern; the sharp ray of light penetrated and dispersed the pervading darkness, and, as stated, a sight met his gaze that for the moment froze the blood in his veins.

No light had been set, but a light had been extinguished, put out forever—the light of life in the body of old Tom Pearce.

We say a light had been *put out;* it had not burned out, as the first object that met the gaze of the detective was the body of Tom Pearce.

There was not a question as to the fact that a crime had been done. The method of the deep damnation of the old boatman's taking off was plainly apparent.

"Can they both have been murdered?" were words which fell in a hoarse whisper from the pallid lips of the detective.

Vance at the first glance concluded that Pearce was the victim of the vengeance of the smugglers, and if they would kill the old man they would not spare the girl.

It was the latter thought that caused the detective's heart to stand still, and when he did partially recover his nerve, his starting eyes

moved round in search of the body of the girl. He stepped into the room, and with tottering steps moved over to the door of the adjoining room, the chamber of Renie.

The door was closed, and the detective could not muster the nerve to open it, and a moan of anguish burst from him.

There he stood, an iron-nerved man, trembling and nerveless in expectancy of a revelation of horror; at length he uttered:

"This will not do; I am Vance."

He pushed open the door, thrust forward his lantern and glanced in. The room was vacant. A sigh of relief fell from his lips. He glanced around and became more and more reassured. No ghastly sight of murdered beauty met his gaze, and an ejaculation of thankfulness struggled from between his lips.

The detective began a careful and thorough examination of the room. There were no signs of a struggle, and another significant fact was revealed: the girl's bed had not been occupied; the tragedy had occurred in the day-time or early in the evening, before the old boatman and his family had retired to bed.

The detective returned to the main room and examined the body of the old man. He also made a note of all the surroundings and took possession of several articles that lay scattered about the room. He did more: he sought for evidence as to the identity of the assassin, and found several little articles which he felt certain would aid him in trailing down the guilty man.

Vance returned to the girl's chamber and renewed his search, and succeeded in making several discoveries which, he hoped, would serve as valuable clews in the future. He was still searching, and deeply intent upn the duty, when he was disturbed by hearing a voice.

"Great mercy! what has happened here?"

The detective was cool again. He had recovered all his accustomed nerve, and he stepped to the outer room.

A man stood in the door-way. It was the stranger, and he, too, held in his hand a masked lantern.

The man's eyes were fixed upon the face of the corpse.

"What has happened here?" he demanded.

"Come in," said the detective.

"Whose body is that?"

"It is the body of old Tom Pearce."

"He was murdered," said the man.

"Come in," again commanded the detective.

"Did you know this body was here when you left me a few moments ago?"

"I did not."

In a hoarse voice the stranger asked:

"Has the girl been murdered?"

"I trust not."

"Have you searched for her?"

"I have."

"And can not find her?"

"No."

"What do you know about this tragedy?"

"As much as you do."

"No doubt at all."

"Do you suspect the assassin?"

"I do! but come in."

"I can stand here."

"Come in, you may attract the attention of some one passing."

"What harm if I do?"

"No harm, but it may prove inconvenient, and may interfere with our efforts to learn the fate of the girl."

"One moment; do you *know* anything concerning this tragedy?"

"All I know is that I came to that door as you did, and my eyes fell upon the ghastly sight."

"When you came here did you expect to find the old man alive?"

"I did."

"And the girl?"

"Yes."

"Then this is a surprise to you?"

"It is."

The stranger entered the room, and in a stern voice he demanded.

"Young man, who are you?"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Vance did not betray the least trepidation, but said, in a calm voice:

"My friend, I was just about to put that same question to you."

"My question came first, and I demand an answer."

"I don't care what you demand."

"I hold you at my mercy."

"Do you think so?"

"You are not what you seem," said the stranger.

"Nor are you," was the quick response.

"Who have I claimed to be, sir?"

"Renie's father."

"And you deny that I am her father?"

"I do."

"Who am I?"

"That is for you to tell."

"Who do you think I am?"

"I am not giving out my thoughts."

"Why not?"

"I've nothing as yet whereon to base an opinion."

"What difference does it make to you who I am?"

"Considerable."

"Will you explain how?"

"You are looking for the girl Renie, and so am I."

"You are?"

"Yes."

"What interest have you in the girl?"

"I am her friend."

"Can you find her—do you know where to look for her?"

"I think I do."

"Will you tell me frankly who you are?"

"No."

"And you demand to know who I am?"

"Yes."

"I have the same right as yourself to refuse to disclose my identity."

"No, sir."

"Why not?"

"You have claimed to be the girl's father."

"Well?"

"You are not her father."

"How do you know?"

"I know."

"It is to my interest to find the girl, and it is to your interest to aid me. I will admit to you that I have not disclosed who or what I am."

"You must, if you desire my aid."

"I can pay you for your service. Listen! you claim to be a friend of the girl; so am I her friend."

"You know something concerning her real identity?"

"I do."

"And you desire my co-operation in discovering the whereabouts of the girl?"

"Possibly I do."

"If you desire my assistance, you must make a confidant of me."

"First tell me; do you believe evil has befallen the girl?"

"Yes."

"What do you suspect?"

"There is no reason why I should make a confidant of you."

"There is."

"Explain wherein."

"If you will prove yourself an honest man, with honest purposes, I will tell you all in good time."

"It will be better to tell me at once."

"I will."

"When?"

"Speedily; but tell me, what has become of her?"

"I do not know."

"But you admit that you suspect."

"Yes."

"Will you tell me what you suspect?"

"I believe she has been abducted."

The stranger betrayed great agitation. He buried his face in his hands. He was at the mercy of the detective, had the latter been disposed to take advantage of the situation.

A few moments' silence pervaded the room, and a strange scene was presented. On the floor lay the corpse of the boatman; seated in a chair into which he had retreated was the man in the rubber coat, and standing over against him with a stern glance in his eye was the detective.

At length the man uncovered his face, and said:

"You think she has been abducted?"

"Yes."

"Have you any suspicion as to the identity of the abductor?"

"I have."

"And you will know where to look for her?"

"I will know who to look for."

"Do you suspect the motive for the abduction?"

"Yes."

"What was the motive?"

"Renie is a beautiful girl."

"You told me differently before."

"I did."

"Now you admit she is beautiful?"

"Yes; one of the most beautiful girls I ever beheld."

"Will you describe her appearance?"

The detective hesitated a moment, but at length did describe the appearance of Renie.

A detective can better describe a missing person's appearance than any other party, as it is a part of their trade to accustom themselves to the art, and our hero's description was vivid and accurate.

"Yes, yes, it is she," muttered the stranger, involuntarily.

"From the description you are satisfied that the adopted daughter of Tom Pearce is the girl you are looking for, my friend?"

"Yes; there is no doubt."

"You recognize the description?"

"Yes."

"Then you have seen the girl?"

"Not since she was a year old."

"Not since she was a year old?" exclaimed the detective.

"No."

"How can you know what she would look like now?"

"I knew her mother."

"I wish I were assured that you are her friend."

"I am her friend."

The real agitation the stranger had betrayed, had modified the detective's original opinion concerning the man.

"Answer me, are you really the girl's father?"

"I am her friend."

"You were at first ready to proclaim yourself her father; now you only claim to be a friend."

"I am her friend, and you must aid me to find her, young man; your service, if successful, will bring you more money than you have previously earned during your whole life."

"Oh, no."

"Yes, sir; I will pay you a fortune if you will find the girl."

"I already possess a fortune."

"You are rich?"

"I am rich."

"Your appearance would not indicate that you were a rich man."

"But you said a moment ago that I was not what I seemed."

"And I was correct?"

"You were right."

"Who are you?"

"Never mind; I am a friend to the girl."

"Why are you her friend?"

"I can not tell you now, but I will admit that I am under deep obligations to her, and when I met you first to-night I was on my way to the cottage."

"How long a time since you saw the girl?"

"It is more than a week.

Strange revelations were to follow.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE detective was beginning to take a more favorable view of the character of the man in the rubber coat.

"It is over a week since you saw Renie?"

"Yes."

"When you saw her last had you reason to fear any special danger she was likely to encounter?"

"Why do you ask that question?"

"You were on the way to this cottage, as you admit, after a week's absence, and when you reach here and find the old boatman murdered and the girl gone, you claim you have an idea as to what has befallen her."

"You reason well, my friend, and the time has arrived when absolute frankness must exist between you and me; the girl's immediate safety demands that you and I should perfectly understand each other. I will admit that I had a suspicion concerning you."

"A suspicion concerning me!" exclaimed the stranger.

"Yes."

"What suspicion did you indulge?"

"I looked upon you as an enemy of the girl."

"And that is why you first deceived me as to her appearance?"

"Yes."

"I am not her enemy."

"I trust you are not, and I must be convinced that you are not."

"What first led you to set me down as an enemy?"

"Shall I speak plainly?"

"Yes.'

"The strange anxiety you showed concerning a certain mysterious box, especially after I had spoken of jewels and gems."

A peculiar smile flitted over the stranger's face, and after a moment's thoughtfulness, he said:

"Surrender the box to me intact, and I will pay you as a reward the money value of all the jewels and gems you may find in it."

"Why are you so anxious to secure the box?"

"It contains proofs of the identity of the girl."

"And when her identity is established?"

"She will come into her rights."

"You know she has been debarred of certain rights?"

"Yes."

"How is it you have let her remain here so many years?"

"I believed her dead."

"When did you hear that she was living?"

"I was summoned a few weeks ago to the dying bed of a notorious criminal. The dying man told me that he had been employed to run away with my child."

"Ah!" interrupted the detective, "you are Renie's father?"

"The girl is my child."

"And you have all along believed her dead?"

"I have all along believed her dead; but the dying man told me that she still lived, that he had placed the infant in charge of a fisherman's wife name Pearce. He told me where the fisherman resided at the time the child was confided to his care, and I at once came here to find her."

"Will you tell me the whole story?"

"I can tell you no more."

"Why not?"

"I have reasons."

The detective revolved the man's revelations in his mind. Had the man told him the whole story Vance would have been led to believe the tale, but despite his desire to do so, he still retained a lurking suspicion as to the purpose and motive of the man in the rubber coat.

"Well," said Vance, "the girl is missing."

"So it appears; but we must find her."

"You are right; I advise you to begin an immediate search for her."

"You will aid me?"

"No."

"You will not aid me?"

"I will not."

"Why not?"

"I told you that if you desired my aid you must confide to me all the facts; you have refused, and I refuse to aid you to find the girl."

The detective was testing the man, seeking to satisfy himself that the stranger really was the father of the missing Renie.

"Very well," said the stranger, "if you refuse to aid me, I shall prosecute the search on my own account."

"That is all right, but now let me give you a little advice; do not be found running around this coast unattended; your life is in danger."

"And I believe," exclaimed the stranger, "that you are the assassin."

As the man spoke he rose excitedly to his feet, and, at the same instant, three men forced their way into the cabin.

A moment, the five men glared at each other in silence, and a strange and weird scene was presented.

The strangers were determined-looking men, and, after a moment, one for them—who appeared to be the leader of the party—pointed toward the dead boatman, and said:

"A murder has been committed here?"

"Yes," answered the detective. "We found the old man lying here murdered, as you see."

"You found him lying there?"

"Yes."

"But that man, but a moment ago, denounced you as the murderer."

"The man did not know what he was saying."

"You must give an account of yourself."

The man in the rubber coat hastened to say:

"Mine were but idle words."

"Ah! you did not mean what you said?" remarked the leader of the intruding party.

"I did not."

"You two men are our prisoners."

The man in the rubber coat became greatly excited, and declared his innocence, and protested against arrest, while the detective, as usual, was cool and unconcerned.

"What authority have you to make an arrest?" he demanded.

"We do not need any authority. We find you two men alone; we overheard one of you accuse the other, and that is all the warrant we need."

"I did not mean what I said!" exclaimed the stranger. "I found this man here as you found him. I never met him before an hour ago."

"It makes no difference; you must both give an account of yourselves."

"You shall not arrest me!" protested the stranger.

"You are already under arrest."

The detective was revolving the matter in his mind. He could not afford to be arrested. He could not give an account of himself; explanations at that moment would be very awkward.

The leader of the three men whispered to one of his companions, and the man addressed withdrew from the cabin. Our hero discerned the purpose of his absence. He had been sent for re-enforcements, and it was necessary that he should make a strike at once. He waited for the man who had been sent away to get beyond hearing, when, in a deliberate manner, Vance said:

"I want you men to get out of this cabin!"

"What right have you to order us out?"

"The same right that you have to declare an arrest."

"Make no attempt to leave this cabin," said the leader."

CHAPTER XL.

It was a critical moment, but the detective had been in worse positions a hundred times. It would have been but a play spell to him had he wanted a scrimmage, but such was not his desire; all he wished was to get out of the place and get away before re-enforcements arrived.

"You have no right to threaten me," said Vance.

"We take the right; you are both under arrest, and we will turn you over to the county authorities on the charge of murder."

The detective, unobserved, seized hold of a piece of broken oar, and the moment he had the club in his possession he leaped forward; his attack was so sudden and unexpected he had knocked over both men before they had any idea of his intentions.

As our readers know, the detective was an adept with the club, and a man capable of coolly taking advantage of any little favorable incident. As the men were knocked over he called to the man in the rubber coat:

"Follow me."

The stranger did not need a second bidding, but leaped across the two prostrate men, and followed the detective from the cabin.

"We must move quicky," said Vance; and he led the way across the sand rifts.

"That was well done," said the stranger.

"It was needful; those men would not have turned us over to the regularly constituted authorities; they are part of a band of lawless men, and we would have been tried and executed before morning, under the auspices of Judge Lynch."

"We will be pursued and tracked," said the stranger.

"Not after we once get across the bay."

"Can you get us across?"

"I should say I could."

"You are a brave and determined man."

"What did you mean by accusing me of the murder?"

"I did not mean it when I accused you; I only wished to learn how you would receive the accusation."

The detective led the way to a little cove where a boat rocked in the tide.

"Can you row?"

"Yes."

"There is a boat; get over to the mainland as quick as you can."

"Will you not go?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"It is not necessary for me to explain to you."

"But I have need of your services."

"We may meet again."

"We must meet again."

"I can be of no service to you."

"You can."

"Never, until you tell me the whole story about Renie. Meantime, you haven't a moment to spare."

"But it is equally dangerous for you to remain here."

"No. I can take care of myself; but I would not be answerable for you."

"Go with me."

"You will remain here until you are captured. Those men will scour the coast."

"They will find you."

"No."

"Then you must be one of them, that you do not fear them."

"I do not fear them. But you must go at once. Listen! they are already on our track."

"Dare you remain?"

"Yes, yes; but you go."

"When shall I see you again?"

"Do you desire to see me?"

"Yes."

"Where do you stay in New York?"

The stranger gave the name of a hotel.

"Your name?"

"Selton."

"I will call at your hotel to-morrow."

"I can depend upon you?"

"Yes."

"Your name?"

"King."

"I will look for you. Come and see me, and you will make your fortune."

"I will come; and now you hasten away."

The stranger entered the boat, and the detective glided away in the darkness. Vance had gone but a short distance, when he saw several men moving along over the sand, and they were moving toward the cove.

As it proved, Mr. Selton was a good oarsman, and was out of sight when the men reached the beach.

The detective crept down and listened to what the men said.

The fellows had lanterns with them, and discerning the tracks of two men on the beach, they argued that both had gone off in the boat.

"They have got away," said one of the men.

"That's dead sure; and we've lost a good chance."

"What's your idea?"

"The man who beat us was that fellow Ballard. We had him sure, but now it's all day. He's gone off, and he has no further call to the coast."

"What brought him here to-night?"

"He came to find the girl Renie."

"Did you expect him?"

"Yes; Denman sent word to look out for him; our captain knew he would be coming to visit the cabin of old Tom Pearce."

"Who could have murdered Pearce?"

"That's the mystery. I learned to-night that the girl has not been seen on the beach for a number of days; whoever killed old Pearce carried off the girl."

"Sol Burton had a grudge against Tom Pearce and his daughter."

"Yes, but Burton was away on the 'Nancy.' He had nothing to do with it."

"Do you suspect any one?"

"Yes."

"Who?"

"Well, I'm not giving out my suspicions;

but we've made a blunder in letting that fellow get away to-night; but it's all up now unless some other of the games against him work out all right."

"I tell you we can run over and catch him on the mainland."

"Do you think so?"

"I do."

"Well, there's where your head ain't level. We will never catch him now that he has got away from the coast."

The men walked away and the detective fell to a big scheme.

Quick as lightning he changed his appearance, worked a perfect transformation, and strolled down toward Rigby's, the old resort of the gang before the storm of adversity set in over them.

Rigby was as deeply interested in the success of the smuggling business as any man connected with it. When trade was good he had plenty of money and did a large business; but when it was bad his business decreased proportionately; up to the time of the arrest of the crew of the "Nancy" Rigby had been a passive man as far as the illicit traffic went, but when Ike Denman was in jail he sent for Rigby, and the man became an active partisan. He had been let into the scheme with the capitalists, and the glow of big money was opened up to him.

A short time after the incident at the cabin of old Tom Pearce the residue of the gang began to assemble at the Rigby place. The men were in an ugly and desperate mood.

Rigby had just returned from a trip to New York, where he had held a second interview with Denman. The men had been awaiting his return.

Meantime the detective had stolen down to Rigby's place, and had taken up an outside position, from whence he could take note for a few seconds, and overhear what immediately followed the man's reappearance.

It was a lucky move on the part of our hero, as he got the remainder of the points needful for the carrying out of his immediate plans.

Rigby had just joined the waiting gang of smugglers, and upon his entrance in their midst, was greeted with the question:

"What news do you bring from York?"

CHAPTER XLI.

RIGBY did not make an immediate reply, but glanced around to see who was gathered in the place.

"Come, old man, give us the news."

"I am waiting to see if there are any strangers in our midst."

"There are no strangers present."

"That's all right; I expect some strangers."

"Who do you expect?"

"Well, boys, I'll tell you; I saw Denman, and he let me into some secrets, and if luck favors, all will come out right; the Government has only one witness."

"Vance?"

"Yes; and if that man can be got rid of all will come out right."

"Did you expect to see Vance here when you looked us over?"

"No; but I expected to see one of the men who was after Vance, and you fellows must go slow if you come across any strangers on the coast."

"There were two strangers on the coast this night."

"There were?"

"Yes."

"Where were they?"

"Up at the Pearce cabin."

"Aha! that means something; but, I'll tell you, I expect two or three men who are to trail Vance, and if they ever catch him on this coast, or anywhere else, they'll down him!"

"Who are the men?"

"Ah! that's just what no one is going to find out, except the few who are inside of the game; but go slow when you meet a stranger during the next few days. Meantime, who was the man up at the Pearce cabin?"

"We counted him as Vance."

"It is possible it may have been Vance."

"There were two of them."

"Two of them?"

"Yes."

"Then you can make up your mind that one of those men was in our interest."

One of the gang related all that had occurred.

"Aha! I see it all. The man in the rubber coat was one of our fellows. He is on the detective's track, you bet, and it will all be right for Ike and the rest of the boys in the morning."

The conversation was continued for some time, and the death of old Tom Pearce was discussed in a sort of left hand manner; nothing definite was disclosed, but the detective was led to believe that a little open play on his part might give him a chance to pick up a few facts.

Spencer Vance was afraid of discovery, and was about moving from his hiding-place when he became aware of the fact that he had been seen.

A great excitement immediately followed. He stepped out from his hiding-place, and was at once surrounded by a dozen armed men.

The detective, as usual, was cool and easy, and, when an opportunity offered, demanded:

"Is there a man in your company named Rigby?"

Silence followed the detective's question. He received no immediate answer, and he once more called out:

"Is there a man in your midst named Rigby?"

The detective spoke in broken English.

Rigby answered himself by asking:

"What do you want of Rigby?"

"Is there such a man here?"

"If there is, what difference does it make to you?"

"I have a message for him."

"A message?"

"Yes."

"Who from?"

"I'll tell Rigby.'"

"See here, my man, don't you go independent, or you will get into trouble."

"I can't get into any trouble if Rigby is around."

"My name is Rigby."

"Can I see you alone?"

"Anything you have to say can be spoken right out; we are all one company here."

"That would not be according to instructions."

Rigby really wanted to talk alone with the man, but did not wish to make it so appear.

"What do you say, boys, shall I let him see me alone?"

"Certainly," came the answer.

"Come along, my friend," commanded Rigby.

The detective followed the proprietor of the tavern inside the house, and was led to a rear room.

"Now what have you got to say?"

"You are Rigby?"

"Yes, I am Rigby."

"I must not make a mistake."

"You are not making a mistake."

"All right, then you are to give me your aid?"

"Give you my aid?"

"Yes."

"I don't understand."

"I am on the lay for Vance."

"Aha! that's the racket!"

"Yes."

"Who sent you here?"

The detective mentioned the name of a man Rigby had not spoken of during his talk with the smugglers.

"Do you know Denman?"

"The captain of the 'Nancy?'"

"Yes."

"I never saw him. I took no orders from him."

"Do you expect Vance down here?"

"I know he is coming."

"When?"

"He may come to-night."

"What is his game?"

"He is going to investigate the death of Tom Pearce."

"Aha! does he know Pearce is dead?"

"Yes."

"How did he get that information?"

"It was carried to him."

"By whom?"

"That I can not tell."

"He really knows the old boatman is dead?"

"Yes."

"Will he come alone?"

"No."

"Who comes with him?"

"Half a dozen other detectives."

"Then how will you have a chance to catch him?"

The detective was silent a moment. He looked Rigby all over in a supercilious manner, but at length answered:

"Don't you know how detectives work?"

"I'd like to have you tell me."

"He will hold his men in the background, and he will go alone to investigate, and call in his aids at the right moment."

"Ah, I see! and you will play against him?"

"If I am not interfered with I will."

"How do you know he has not been here?"

"I know he has not been here."

"Two men were here."

"Yes, I was on their track. I know who they were."

CHAPTER XLII.

RIGBY did not for a moment appear to suspect the truthfulness of the detective's story.

"Who were they?" he demanded.

"Detectives."

"And Vance was one of them?"

"No."

"Were they connected with him?"

"That I can not answer."

"And what do you propose to do?"

"Lay around for my man, if I am not interfered with. It is my game to appear as one of the gang, and that will give me a chance to get well in on his trail when he comes."

"I can fix that part of the business for you."

"That is all I want; but, if I am to be jumped at every time I make a move, I'll get away."

"You were hiding around here?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't you come out openly?"

"I was waiting to get a chance to see you alone. I did not want to be known to all your friends—you never can tell who will talk too much."

"Our men don't talk."

"Some of them must have talked."

"What makes you think so?"

"How else would Vance find out about the death of old Tom Pearce?"

"The death of Tom Pearce is as much a mystery to our men as to any one else."

"Vance thinks your men did it."

"How do you know?"

"I've lain on his track, and overheard him talking with the United States District Attorney."

"Our men know nothing about the death of Tom Pearce."

"Have they a suspicion?"

"I have not heard them say."

"I wish I had a point on that affair."

"Why?"

"It would give me a sure hitch on Vance."

"It's a good scheme; I will talk with the boys and see if any of them have any suspicion."

"What will you tell them about me?"

"Oh, I will fix that all right."

"They must not bother me."

"You will not be bothered."

"That's all right; go and see if you can pick up any points."

The detective was left alone; he was really only working the game to learn all he could about the death of old Tom Pearce, and all he wished to know was whether the smugglers had killed the old man or not; if they were innocent, he knew just in what direction to look for the assassin, and also *where to look* for the beautiful Renie.

Meantime the gang were anxiously waiting to hear the result of Rigby's conference with the man whom they had caught eavesdropping around the tavern.

Rigby rejoined his friends and customers, who at once crowded around him.

"Well, who is the fellow?"

"He's all right, boys; you remember what I told you about strangers being around here on the lookout for Vance?"

"Is that fellow one, then?"

"He's all right."

"Have you seen his credentials?"

"I tell you he is all right."

"Don't like his looks," said one man.

"Don't like his actions," said another.

"The way we found him looks bad," said a third.

"Now you fellows rest quiet; I know who the man is, and he's all right; the man don't travel who can fool me."

"You are satisfied he's all right?"

"Yes."

"Who were the other two men who were up at the cabin where the body of old Pearce lies?"

"Those are the fellows you ought to have nipped."

"Was Vance one of them?"

"That we can't tell, but Vance will be here to-night; and if you men do not spoil the game we can fix things all right."

"Is that what that fellow told you?"

"I know what I am talking about."

"Vance is to be here to-night?"

"Yes."

"Well, it's time he was here."

The answer causes a laugh.

Rigby saw that the men were not satisfied, and he sought to change the subject. He said:

"So old Pearce is dead?"

"He is."

"Where's the girl?"

"That's more than we'll tell you."

"I always thought Renie's good looks would bring trouble to some one sooner or later," said Rigby.

"You don't think any of the gang had anything to do with bringing harm to the old man?"

There came a general denial of any such suspicion.

The men, however, appeared to be quite restive as to the identity of the man whom they had found prowling around.

Rigby went inside to report what he had heard to the detective, and upon opening the door he uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"Well, this gets me!" he muttered.

The room was vacant—the man had left.

"Where can he be?" muttered Rigby, and he commenced a search, but the man was nowhere to be found.

A curse fell from his lips.

"Have I been fooled, after all?" he muttered. "I'll be shot if it don't look so!"

The tavern-keeper continued his search, but it proved fruitless; the man was nowhere to be found.

"I daren't go and tell the boys about this," he muttered; "but it looks as though I had been fooled."

The real fact was the tavern-keeper had been fooled. Vance was not the man to depend upon hearsay. He had followed after Rigby, and had overheard every word that had passed between the man and his friends.

The detective was fully convinced, from what he overheard, that the smugglers were innocent of old Tom Pearce's death; indeed, he had so believed from the first, but it was one of his methods to make sure, and when once really convinced he knew as stated, where to look for the real assassin, and he folded his tent, like the Arab, and as silently stole away.

CHAPTER XLIII.

Upon the day following the scenes described in our preceding chapter, a strange interview was in progress in a magnificent apartment in a house situated in one of the most fashionable quarters of New York.

A beautiful young lady, richly attired, had been sitting alone in the elegant apartment described, when a man of dark complexion entered the room, and, with silent step and a pleased smile upon his dark face, he advanced toward the girl.

Just a moment preceding the entrance of the dark-faced man, the girl had indulged in a brief soliloquy. She murmured:

"Well—well, my mind is made up. I have fooled that villain! He thinks I love him. He thinks I have been dazzled and bewildered by the possession of all these fine clothes and the wearing of these costly jewels; but he is mistaken. I hate him—I abhor him! He is an assassin! He thinks I do not know it; but I saw him strike down that good old man, Tom Pearce, and I have but lured him on with a promise of my love, only that I might hold him until an opportunity offers to hand him over to justice."

A moment the girl was thoughtful and silent, but speedily she resumed her soliloquy, saying:

"I wonder what could have become of Vance! He lives—he has been successful, I saw in a paper yesterday. Why does he not come to me? Well, well! as he does not come to me, I will go to him. It is time that I unmasked before this scoundrel, who thinks he has won me by the tragedy through which he temporarily obtained possession of me. But we shall see! I am 'Renie, the Wild Girl of the Shore,' as Vance once called me, and I will prove myself more than a match for this deep, designing scoundrel."

The girl had just uttered the words above quoted when the door opened, and the man entered the room.

As stated, he advanced with a pleased smile upon his face.

"Renie, darling," he said, "I have pleasant news for you."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, my dear. To-day we sail for my beautiful home in Cuba where you will be the belle of society, and where we shall be married."

"We sail for Cuba to-day?"

"Yes, to-day."

"I thought you did not intend to go until the season was more advanced?"

"I have decided to go to-day; business calls me there."

"And you sail to-day?"

"Yes."

"I can not go with you."

"You can not go with me?"

"No."

At that moment a most extraordinary incident occurred, but its real character can not be revealed until our narrative has progressed. The incident, however, caused a complete change to come over the girl. She had glanced in a mirror behind the man who had just made the announcement to her, and she had beheld a sight which caused, as stated, a complete change to come over her demeanor.

"You must go without me," said the girl.

The latter spoke in a different tone.

The man glanced at her, and asked:

"Why, Renie, what has come over you. Did you not give me to understand that you were prepared to go with me to Cuba any time I desired?"

"Yes; I gave you so to understand."

"Then why do you now refuse to go?"

"I will tell you; the time has come for me to unmask, Mr. Garcia."

"The time has come for you to unmask?"

"Yes."

"I do not understand."

"You shall."

"I must."

"Murderer, I have but been playing you that I might in the end entrap you into the hands of justice."

A change had come over the demeanor of the girl; but a still more remarkable change came over the face of Garcia. He glanced at the girl with blazing eyes, and his hands worked nervously and there was a tremulousness in his voice as he asked:

"Are you mad, girl?"

"No, I am not mad. Do not think I have been deceived; I know you, I have known who you were all the time, thou chief of the smugglers."

"And you have been deceiving me?"

"I have."

"And what has been your purpose?"

"To wait until a favorable moment when I could denounce you, and hand you over to justice."

Our readers have already discerned the truth; but we will make plain the incident which led up to the scene we are about describing. Upon the very night Vance sailed on the yacht, Garcia, with a gang of men, appeared after midnight at the cottage of Tom Pearce. The old fisherman was murdered and Renie was drugged and carried away; but the girl had been a witness of the murder before she was found insensible lying beside her bed.

When the girl recovered from the drug which had been administered to her, she found herself in a magnificently furnished apartment, and the man Garcia was at her side.

The villain had told the girl a cunning tale. He told her that Tom Pearce had consigned her to his care, and proceeded with a story which it is not necessary for us to repeat.

The girl knew the tale to be a lie, but, at the moment, she resolved to pretend to believe the story and fool the man, when she could lure him on to justice and condign punishment.

She had played her part well, and Garcia, who was a conceited man, believed he had won the girl's love; and matters were going on in the most pleasant manner, when he received news of the capture of the gang of smugglers, and at once realized his peril, when he determined to fly with Renie to Cuba.

It was thus matters stood when the man made the announcement to the girl.

"Renie," said the man, "you are trifling with me; you are having a joke at my expense."

"I am not; I am resolved to bring you to justice!"

"And you do not love me?"

"I loathe you; your presence is a curse!"

"And you have been deceiving me?"

"I have been deliberately deceiving you."

"And you announce your perfidy?"

"Yes, I do!"

"I can not believe that you speak truly."

"The hour has come when I must speak truly. I have been deceiving you, but now I speak the truth."

"Girl, do you fully comprehend what you are saying?"

"I do."

"Do you know your peril?"

"Yes."

"And you dare tell me that you are a beautiful cheat?"

"I dare."

"I am amazed."

"You will be more amazed, you villain."

"You think I am a villain?"

"I know you are."

"And you hate me?"

"Yes, I hate you!"

"Once for all, are you telling me the truth now?"

"I am telling you the truth."

"Then, rash girl, beware!"

CHAPTER XLIV.

As the man Garcia spoke a figure darted in through the door-way, and with a cry of joy Renie exclaimed:

"You have come at last!"

"Yes; I am here."

Garcia rose to his feet, a look of terror upon his face. He recognized the intruder at a glance; it was Vance, the Government detective.

The latter but exchanged a word with Renie, when he drew a pair of handcuffs and advanced toward Garcia.

The latter recoiled and demanded:

"What would you do?"

"Arrest you as a smuggler."

"Approach me at your peril," exclaimed the felon, and he raised his hand in a threatening manner.

Vance had no time to spare, and Garcia was quickly overpowered and handcuffed.

Vance led Renie from the room.

The detective had come prepared. He found several officers at the door, who took possession of the house and the villain Garcia.

Our hero heard Renie's story while taking her to a place of safety, and after leaving her, he proceeded to the hotel to meet the gentleman named Selton, whom he had reason to believe had a strange story to tell.

Upon reaching the hotel Vance was shown to a handsome suite of rooms, and a few moments later, was joined by the gentleman whom he had met under such strange circumstances at the coast.

The meeting was cordial, and Mr. Selton said:

"I have been waiting for you."

"Well, sir, and here I promised to call and I have kept my word."

"Now, sir, one word. Have you learned any of the circumstances surrounding the death of old Tom Pearce?"

"He was murdered."

"And the murderer has been discovered?"

"Yes, he has been arrested."

"Will you tell me all the circumstances?"

The detective told him the details of Garcia's arrest.

Mr. Selton showed a great deal of agitation as he asked:

"And the girl Renie?"

Vance assumed a grave look as he said:

"Mr. Selton, you must satisfy me that you have an honest right to inquire about that girl before I answer your question."

"I have a right."

"State the facts, sir."

"First tell me your own interest in the girl."

Vance told the real facts of his meeting with

Renie, and when he had concluded, Mr. Selton said:

"So you are Vance the great Government detective?"

"I am."

"I can confide in you; had you told me who you were, I should have been pleased to have told my story sooner."

"Better late than never."

"My tale is briefly told. Renie is my daughter."

"Your daughter?"

"Yes."

"How came you to place her in the hands of old Tom Pearce?"

"I never did. I supposed the child dead all these years; listen: Renie's mother died when the child was a week old, and a year later I married again; business called me to California, and while I was away I received a letter from my wife announcing the death of my infant child. I remained away one year, and upon my return accepted as true all the circumstances as related to me concerning the death of my child.

"The years sped on, and another child, a son, was born to me; the latter lived to be fifteen a year ago. He died, and then my wife was taken sick, and on her death-bed she made to me a terrible confession. She told me how she had employed a man to carry my child away, and lose it so that the infant's identity could never be discovered. She told me that her motive was to secure my whole fortune for her unborn children. Before she died she told me the name of the man to whom she had committed the business. I spent a year searching for the man; I found him a few weeks ago a convict for life. He told me how he had disposed of the child, and I came here to search for her, and you know all the rest."

When Mr. Selton had concluded, Vance said: "I am satisfied, sir, that you have told me a true tale."

"Yes, sir, my tale is true, and now, please tell me of my child."

"Your child is safe."

"You have found her?"

"I have."

"Where is she? lead me to my child at once."

"No, sir, that will not do, I must prepare her for the meeting; but first let me tell you of her."

Vance proceeded and related all the facts concerning Renie, and when the father learned that his child was educated to her rightful position in life he was rejoiced.

"Yes," said Vance, "your child is fitted to adorn any station in life; but you must see her and judge for yourself. I will go and tell her the strange revelations that have come from your lips."

Vance proceeded to the place where he had left the girl, and by degrees prepared her for the wonderful announcement. The girl listened to the story calmly, and when the detective had finished his tale, she said:

"I am not surprised; I had hoped some day to know both father and mother, but I am happy in having found a father."

"Will you go to your father?"

"I will."

"When?"

"Now, at once."

The two entered a carriage, and half an hour later father and daughter were clasped in each other's arms.

The father had a little surprise for Vance. He had removed certain little disguise appliances, and when father and daughter stood side by side, a most striking resemblance was apparent.

We will not attempt to describe all that passed between father and child; but the facts of their relationship were fully established, and the mystery of the box containing the supposed jewels was explained.

The convict who had committed the child to Mrs. Pearce had given her the box, and had represented that it was filled with costly jewels; but his statement was a lie, and the old lady's imagination had aided her in swelling the value of the contents of the box.

Mr. Selton proved to be a very wealthy man, living in a Western city, and Renie was taken to her grand home.

Meantime, Vance remained in New York to appear as a witness against the band of conspirators, and the result of his labors was the breaking up of one of the best organized smuggling schemes that was ever attempted in America.

When our hero's duties were over, upon invitation he went to pay a visit to Mr. Selton and his daughter, and there's a certain rumor in the air; but as yet we are not permitted to record that another of our heroes has hooked on to one of our heroines; but we will say that the chances very much favor the prospect that when Vance met the "Wild Girl of the Coast" upon that night, he met his future wife.

THE END.

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101 Ein Kampf um Rom, von F. Dahn. Zweite Hälfte 20
102 Spinoza, von Berth. Auerbach 20
103 Von der Erde zum Mond, von J. Verne 10
104 Der Todesgruss der Legionen, von G. Samarow. 20
105 Reise um den Mond, von Julius Verne 10
106 Fürst und Musiker, von Max Ring 20
107 Nena Sahib, von J. Retcliffe. Erster Band..... 20
107 Nena Sahib, von J. Retcliffe. Zweiter Band.... 20
107 Nena Sahib, von J. Retcliffe. Dritter Band..... 20
108 Reise nach dem Mittelpunkte der Erde, von J. Verne 10
109 Die silberne Hochzeit, von S. Kohn 10
110 Das Spukehaus, von A. von Winterfeld 20
111 Die Erben des Wahnsinns, von T. Marx 10
112 Der Ulan, von Joh. van Dewall 10
113 Um hohen Preis, von E. Werner 20
114 Schwarzwälder Dorfgeschichten, von B. Auerbach. Erste Hälfte 20
114 Schwarzwälder Dorfgeschichten, von B. Auerbach. Zweite Hälfte 20
115 Reise um die Erde, von Julius Verne 10
116 Cäsars Ende, von S. J. R. (Schluss von 104) 20
117 Auf Capri, von Carl Detlef 10
118 Severa, von E. Hartner 20
119 Ein Arzt der Seele, von Wilh. von Hillern 20
120 Die Livergnas, von Hermann Willfried 10
121 Zwanzigtausend Meilen unterm Meer, von Jul. Verne 20
122 Mutter und Sohn, von A. Godin 10
123 Das Haus des Fabrikanten, von G. Samarow.... 20
124 Bruderflicht und Liebe, von L. Schücking 10
125 Die Römerfahrt der Epigonen, von G. Samarow. Erste Hälfte 20
125 Die Römerfahrt der Epigonen, von G. Samarow. Zweite Hälfte 20
126 Porkeles und Porkelessa, von J. Scherr 10
127 Ein Friedensstörer, von Victor Blüthgen, und Der heimliche Gast, von R. Byr 20
128 Schöne Frauen, von R. Edmund Hahn 10
129 Bakchen und Thyrsosträger, von A. Niemann... 20
130 Getrennt, Roman von E. Polko 10
131 Alte Ketten, Roman von L. Schücking 20
132 Ueber die Wolken, von Wilhelm Jensen 10
133 Das Gold des Orion, von H. Rosenthal-Bonin.... 10
134 Um den Halbmond, von Gr. Samarow. Erste Hälfte 20
134 Um den Halbmond, von Gr. Samarow. Zweite Hälfte 20
135 Troubadour-Novellen, von P. Heyse 10
136 Der Schweden-Schatz, von H. Wachenhusen.... 20
137 Die Bettlerin vom Pont des Arts und Das Bild des Kaisers, von Wilh. Hauff 10
138 Modelle, Hist. Roman, von A. von Winterfeld... 20
139 De. Krieg um die Haube, von Stefanie Keyser.. 10
140 Numa Roumestan, von Alphonse Daudet 20
141 Spätsommer, Novelle von C. von Sydow, und Engelid, Novelle von Balduin Möllhausen..... 10
142 Bartolomäus, von Brusehaver, und Musma Cussalin, Novellen von L. Ziemssien 10
143 Ein gemeuchelter Dichter, Komischer Roman von A. von Winterfeld. Erste Hälfte 20
143 Ein gemeuchelter Dichter, Komischer Roman von A. von Winterfeld. Zweite Hälfte 20
144 Ein Wort, Neuer Roman von G. Ebers 20
145 Novellen, von Paul Heyse 10
146 Adam Homo in Versen, von Paludan-Müller.... 20
147 Ihr einziger Bruder, von W. Heimburg 10
148 Ophelia, Roman von H. von Lankenau 20
149 Nemesis, von Helene von Hülsen 10
150 Felicitas, Histor. Roman von F. Dahn 10
151 Die Claudier, Roman von Ernst Eckstein..... 20
152 Eine Verlorene, von Leopold Kompert 10
153 Luginsland, Roman von Otto Roquette 20
154 Im Banne der Musen, von W. Heimburg 10
155 Die Schwester, von L. Schücking 10
156 Die Colonie, von Friedrich Gerstäcker 20
157 Deutsche Liebe, Roman von M. Müller 10
158 Die Rose von Delhi, von Fels. Erste Hälfte.... 20
158 Die Rose von Delhi, von Fels. Zweite Hälfte... 20
159 Debora, Roman von W. Müller 10
160 Eine Mütter, von Friedrich Gerstäcker 20
161 Friedhofsblume, von W. von Hillern 10
162 Nach der ersten Liebe, von K. Frenzel 20
163 Gebannt und erlöst, von E. Werner 20
164 Uhlenhans, Roman von Fried. Spielhagen..... 20
165 Klytia, Roman von G. Taylor 20
166 Mayo, Erzählung von P. Lindau 10
167 Die Herrin von Ibichstein, von F. Henkel 20
168 Die Saxoborussen, von Gr. Samarow. Erste Hälfte 20
168 Die Saxoborussen, von Gr. Samarow. Zweite Hälfte 20
169 Serapis, Roman von G. Ebers 20
170 Ein Gottesurtheil, Roman von E. Werner..... 10
171 Die Kreuzfahrer, Roman von Felix Dahn..... 20
172 Der Erbe von Weidenhof, von F. Pelzeln..... 20
173 Die Reise nach dem Schicksal, von K. Franzos.. 10
174 Villa Schönow, Roman von W. Raabe 10
175 Das Vermächtniss, von Ernst Eckstein. Erste Hälfte 20
175 Das Vermächtniss, von Ernst Eckstein. Zweite Hälfte 20
176 Herr und Frau Bewer, von P. Lindau..... 10
177 Die Nihilisten, von Joh. Scherr 10
178 Die Frau mit den Karfunkelsteinen, von E. Marlitt 20
179 Jetta, von George Taylor 20
180 Die Stieftochter, von J. Smith 20
181 An der Heilquelle, von Fried. Spielhagen..... 20
182 Was der Todtenkopf erzählt, von M. Jokai..... 20
183 Der Zigeunerbaron, von M. Jokai 10
184 Himmlische u. irdische Liebe, von Paul Heyse. 20
185 Ehre, Roman von O. Schubin 20
186 Violanta, Roman von E. Eckstein 20
187 Nemi, Erzählung von H. Wachenhusen 10
188 Strandgut, von Joh. von Dewall. Erste Hälfte.. 20
188 Strandgut, von Joh. von Dewall. Zweite Hälfte 20
189 Homo sum, von Georg Ebers 20
190 Eine Aegyptische Königstochter, von G. Ebers. Erste Hälfte 20
190 Eine Aegyptische Königstochter, von G. Ebers. Zweite Hälfte 20
191 Sanct Michael, von E. Werner. Erste Hälfte ... 20
191 Sanct Michael, von E. Werner. Zweite Hälfte .. 20
192 Die Nilbraut, von Georg Ebers. Erste Hälfte.. 20
192 Die Nilbraut, von Georg Ebers. Zweite Hälfte. 20
193 Die Andere, von W. Heimburg 20
194 Ein armes Mädchen, von W. Heimburg 20
195 Der Roman der Stiftsdame, von Paul Heyse..... 20
196 Kloster Wendhusen, von W. Heimburg 20
197 Das Vermächtniss Kains, von Sacher-Masoch. Erste Hälfte 20
197 Das Vermächtniss Kains, von Sacher-Masoch. Zweite Hälfte 20
198 Frau Venus, von Karl Frenzel 20
199 Eine Viertelstunde Vater, von F. W. Hackländer 10
200 Heimatklang, von E. Werner 10
201 Herzenskrisen, Roman von W. Heimburg 20
202 Die Schwestern, Roman von G. Ebers..... 20
203 Der Egoist, von E. Werner 10
204 Salvatore, von Ernst Eckstein 20
205 Lumpenmüllers Lieschen, von W. Heimburg... 20
206 Das einsame Haus, von Adolf Streckfuss..... 20
207 Die verlorene Handschrift, von Gustav Freytag. Erste Hälfte 20
207 Die verlorene Handschrift, von Gustav Freytag. Zweite Hälfte 20
208 Das Eulenhaus, von E. Marlitt 20
209 Des Herzens Golgatha, Roman von H. Wachenhusen 20
210 Aus dem Leben meiner alten Freundin, von W. Heimburg 20
211 Die Gred, Roman von G. Ebers. Erste Hälfte.. 20
211 Die Gred, Roman von G. Ebers. Zweite Hälfte 20
212 Trudchens Heirath, von Wilh. Heimburg..... 20
213 Asbein, von Ossip Schubin 20
214 Die Alpenfee, von E. Werner 20
215 Nero, von E. Eckstein. Erste Hälfte..... 20
25 Nero, von E. Eckstein. Zweite Hälfte..... 20
216 Zwei Seelen, von Rud. Lindau 20
217 Manöver- u. Kriegsbilder, von Joh. von Dewall 10
218 Lore von Tollen, von W. Heimburg..... 20
219 Spitzen, Roman von P. Lindau 20
220 Der Referendar, Novelle von Ernst Eckstein..... 10
221 Das Geiger-Evchen, Roman von A. Dom..... 20
222 Die Götterburg, von M. Jokai 20
223 Der Kronprinz und die deutsche Kaiserkrone, von G. Freytag 10
224 Nicht im Geleise, Roman von Ida Boy-Ed..... 20
225 Camilla, Roman von E. Eckstein 20
226 Josua, Erzählung aus biblischer Zeit von Georg Ebers 20
227 Am Belt, Roman von Greger Samarow..... 20
228 Henrik Ibsen's Werke in vier Bänden, jeder Band. 20
229 In geistiger Irre, Roman von H. Köhler 20
230 Flammenzeichen, Roman von E. Werner..... 20
231 Der Seelsorger, von V. Valentin 10
232 Der Präsident, von K. E. Franzos..... 20
233 Erlachhof, Roman von O. Schubin..... 20
234 Ein Mann, von H. Heiberg..... 20
235 Nach zehn Jahren, Roman von M. Jokai..... 20
236 Um die Ehre, Roman von Moritz von Reichenbach 20
237 Eine Hof-Intrigue, von C. H. v. Dedenroth..... 10
238 Gräfin Ruth, von Emile Erhard..... 20
239 Eine unbedeutende Frau, von W. Heimburg..... 20
240 Boris Lensky, Roman von Ossip Schubin..... 20
241 Die Erbtante, Roman von Johannes van Dewall 20
242 Gloria victis!, Roman von Ossip Schubin..... 20
243 Bravo rechts!, Roman von Ossip Schubin..... 20
244 Merlin, Roman von Paul Heyse. Erste Hälfte.. 20
244 Merlin, Roman von Paul Heyse. Zweite Hälfte.. 20

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No. 2

"How about this Government officer who has been prowling around here?" was the question which fell from Garcia's lips.

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